

REPETITION WITHOUT REPLICATION: A STUDY OF HOW MODERN ADAPTATIONS
ALTER THE SOCIAL ARGUMENTS IN THE BRONTË SISTERS' NOVELS *JANE EYRE*,
WUTHERING HEIGHTS, AND *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL*

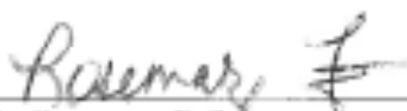
by

Courtney S. Simpkins

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Dr. Rosemary F. Guruswamy
Thesis Advisor

4/20/16
Date


Dr. Jolanta Wawrzynka
Committee Member

4/20/16
Date


Dr. Frank Napolitano
Committee Member

4/20/2016
Date

Abstract

In spite of the substantial work completed by scholars regarding literary adaptations compared to their source texts, “Repetition without Replication” aims to delve further into this discussion by focusing on specific social arguments present in the novels by Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, but missing or altered in the adaptations of these works. These arguments include the importance of homosocial relationships in a young woman’s life, the roles of religion and competition in the building or demolishing of these relationships, the nineteenth century’s preoccupation with female appearance, and the dangers of the patriarchal institution of marriage. The cinematization of a novel is a delicate process, and for many critics and movie buffs, the fidelity of the adaptation tells whether or not it is a successful rendition. If too many details are altered, the arguments in the original text are inherently changed as well. To this effect, my thesis examines these specific arguments in three novels – *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* – and their adaptations for the ways in which the adaptors have enhanced or diminished the arguments by adding, deleting, or simply changing certain pivotal scenes.

Dedication

To the men and women inspired by Victorian literature.

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Introduction

[Adaptation] is not a copy in any mode of reproduction...It is repetition but without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty.

As adaptation, it involves both memory and change, persistence and variation.

Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 173

Many film critics focus on one criterion for whether or not an adaptation is successful: its fidelity to the source novel. However, as noted in the epigraph, adaptations are not simply recreations of a novel; they are their own primary text. Robert Stam's "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptations" takes this sentiment even further by asking whether or not fidelity is possible when cinematizing a novel (54). In this process, a novel is taken from its primary form, interpreted and adapted into a secondary form (the screenplay) by a single writer or a team of writers, then once again interpreted and adapted into a tertiary form by the director, and some scholars even believe texts are adapted once more into a quaternary form by the final editors, producers, and director. Therefore, from the original author's imagination to the movie theater, each text is adapted at least three different times, by different people each time. Many adaptation scholars, critics, and filmmakers focus on the extent to which the adaptation is faithful to the original text (and whether that means it's successful), but very few have stopped and examined the extent to which these adaptations enhance or detract from the arguments presented in the original texts.

The novels of the Brontë sisters are continually adapted to screen, often several times each – especially concerning the canonical works. *Jane Eyre* was first adapted in 1934, and has nine adaptations; *Wuthering Heights* was first adapted in 1939, and has twelve adaptations; *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, on the other hand, has only one adaptation. Although many of these adaptations stay fairly faithful to the plot of each novel, adapting novels which are hundreds of pages is almost impossible, unless each adaptation lasts several hours. To combat this,

filmmakers must make decisions about what to keep and what to cut, what portions to stay faithful to and what portions to stray away from, and what sections to focus on and what sections to glance over. This thesis will focus on the quaternary adaptations, and examine the ways these modern cinematic versions alter the social arguments presented in specific novels of the Brontë sisters.

The three literary Brontë sisters each had their own personalities, but all had a nearly identical upbringing and developed many of the same beliefs about nineteenth century female existence in society. The sisters adopted the gender-neutral pen-names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, because they did “not want to expose themselves to the prejudice or the condescension then often displayed by critics toward women writers, but scrupling to take names positively masculine” (Bentley 37). Many publishers automatically assumed them to be male, so the sisters could write freely about their experienced injustices. Rather than being seen as women who were “complaining” about their status in society, they would be “critiquing” these injustices (much like male authors were seen to have been doing). Anne Brontë, the youngest and most “pious” sister, is noted as having “relentless honesty” and “close realistic observation” (Bentley 109). On the other hand, although the sisters had many of the same ideologies, Charlotte believed Anne’s biggest mistake was her “terrible picture of the gradual deterioration of a drunkard” (108). Part of her disdain could be attributed to the notion that Arthur Huntingdon is based on their equally alcoholic brother, Branwell, and part could be that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* revisits the same arguments from her sisters’ novels, but much more overtly critiques the characters and their actions.

Regardless of the reasoning, the Brontë sisters created similar arguments, which would have been clear and understood greatly by their direct audience and contemporaries. As noted in Tom Winnifrith's biography of the sisters,

It is important to remember that the Brontës were novelists of the 1840s, sharing many of the preoccupations of their great contemporaries, even though their isolation caused them to show their preoccupations in a startling original way. In their experiments with different levels of narrative, in their exploration of dual personalities, and in their refusal to be tied down by conventional realism, the Brontës do remind us of their eighteenth-century predecessors as well as twentieth-century innovators of the novel. (155)

Here, we see that the Brontë sisters used their isolation from the world in a positive way, by creating stories which identify and critique many nineteenth century female miseries. Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel depicts her arguments about homosocial relationships, religion, appearance, and marriage outwardly, but with caution; Emily Brontë's 1847 novel codes some of her arguments about homosocial relationships, class, and abuse, but the arguments are still present; Anne Brontë's 1848 novel does not sugarcoat her arguments about gossip, the courting season, spousal abuse, and divorce. Each sister focuses on a female protagonist, who is bound in some way to an abusive man; they illustrate their characters in very similar, yet often negative, lights. This reflects the author's certain "time and place", creating a more honest depiction of nineteenth century society. Readers of their novels would immediately recognize the devastating effects of marrying for the wrong reasons and the legal repercussions of a mother "kidnapping" her child to save him from an abusive father.

When audiences watch twentieth or twenty-first century adaptations of these nineteenth century novels, they cannot necessarily see the “reflection of Victorian repression and a cry of private anguish, the impossibility of love in a predatory universe, the redemption of love through death” (Bluestone 112), especially since many modern directors are working with their own “time and place” and catering to an audience to whom these arguments mean little. Mike Barker’s adaptation of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, for example, takes the arguments made in the source novel, keeps as much of the aura of the scenes as possible, but adds an almost necessary explicit spousal rape scene to reach his audience on a more emotional level. At the time of its filming, the spousal rape laws were drastically changing, so the addition of this scene actually enhances Anne Brontë’s initial argument about domestic violence.

Modern film critics and audience members often “resort to the elusive notion of the ‘spirit’ of a work or an artist that has to be captured and conveyed in the adaptation for it to be a success” (Hutcheon 10). The language of this quotation sounds quite terse, and some may even say this is a lackluster way to study an adaptation. I disagree with that sentiment, because studying the alterations made often allows the audience to experience a slightly different story, with arguments of its own. Adapting one medium to another does not inherently create a better/worse hierarchy; it simply allows the two to interact with one another in a different way. Perhaps a screenwriter’s or director’s desire to keep a film “true” to the novel should be considered an homage to the author’s vision. An example of this, and the original novel-to-film adaptation, is the 1924 adaptation of Frank Norris’s *McTeague*. In order to convey the essence of Norris’s novel, the filmmaker Erich von Stroheim produced an eight hour film entitled *Greed*. Of course, the director was forced to cut the final product down to two hours, resulting in the seemingly disjointed version of the story (“Cruel and Unusual”). Unfortunately, this is not what

Erich von Stroheim set out to do with his adaptation; he wanted to create a vivid, visual depiction of Norris's text, but the studio couldn't, or wouldn't, allow for this long of a movie. We see this same sentiment in eight adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. These attempt to pack a five hundred page book into a two-hour time span. However, the 2006 adaptation, directed by Susanna White, comes in right under the four-hour mark, and is much closer, more loyal, and true to the novel than many of the other films.

In his book, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, Thomas Leitch outlines several types of adaptations. Among them is the first type, "curatorial adaptations." These "subordinate whatever specific resources they find in cinema to the attempt to preserve their original texts as faithfully as possible" (96). In other words, the writers and directors of these adaptations work tirelessly, regardless of cinematic conventions, to keep the spirit of the source text alive, and the original arguments intact, much like the adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. The second type, "adjustment," is where "a promising earlier text is rendered more suitable for filming by one or more of a wide variety of strategies," including compression, expansion, correction, updating, and superimposition (98). This type of adaptation alters a text that is too long, too short, or it provides an alternate outcome, much like the other adaptations surveyed in this thesis. Likewise, George Bluestone states, in relation to the film adaptations of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*,

[with] all the additional changes that a new medium demands...it becomes all but impossible to effect a "faithful" rendition. If nothing else, the impossibility of retaining Emily Brontë's tropes would make the shift inevitable. The cinema cannot retain...the simile which shows how Heathcliff's anguished cry is 'like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears.' In abandoning

language for the visual image, the film leaves behind the author's most characteristic signature, her style. (113)

Similarly, much of *Jane Eyre*'s arguments in the novel are shown via Jane's inner thoughts, which cannot be adequately reproduced on screen, unless a majority of the film were to use a voice-over. This does not happen, so some of the arguments are missing from the adaptation. Also, many of the arguments within *Wuthering Heights* occur via dialogue between certain characters. In the adaptations, however, some of these are eliminated completely or occur between completely different characters, inherently altering the "meaning" of the original text. Although it is easy to dismiss an unfaithful adaptation, as many film critics do, by saying it corrupts the integrity of its source text, "what has not been sufficiently recognized is that such destruction is inevitable. In the fullest sense of the word, the filmist [sic] becomes not a translator for an established author, but a new author in his own right" (Bluestone 62). Rather than the adaptation being seen as a secondary source, it is actually a primary source in its own right. The two questions remaining, and the ones which I attempt to answer with my thesis, are first, whether or not the deletion, addition, or alteration of certain scenes and arguments creates an unsuccessful adaptation; and second, how these changes enhance or detract from each novel.

Chapter One

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is often described as a fundamental feminist text, due to her arguments about and depictions of homosocial relationships, religion, the preoccupation with appearance, and marriage. In the novel, homosocial relationships are few and far between, and at a young age, Jane, like Brontë, encounters the premature death of a loved one. Despite Helen's early exit, the sincerity of their friendship revolves around both girls' religious beliefs. Although religion is what brings the two together, Brontë critiques the social institution of religion through her depiction of Mr. Brocklehurst, a clergyman who uses the Bible for his own gains.

Throughout the entire novel, and heavily emphasized while Jane is at Lowood Institution, the theme of appearance and appropriate beauty occurs on nearly every page. Female-to-female comparisons were typical and expected in the nineteenth century, so Charlotte Brontë used this to her advantage as she shows how detrimental this type of competition actually is to women. More harmful to women than competition, however, was the institution of marriage, shown through Bertha Mason's unhealthy relationship with Mr. Rochester. In the novel, Charlotte Brontë critiques several facets of nineteenth century womanhood through Jane Eyre's personal experiences. However, many of her points do not translate explicitly to the screen. For instance, Susanna White's 2009 four-hour adaptation can be considered a point of contention in adaptation studies, or more accurately within fidelity criticism. The movie is considered, by some scholars, a success because it is much "truer" to the original than other adaptations. No matter, the slightest details transformed in this film alter Brontë's original points about female-female friendship and competitiveness, religion, appearance, and marriage.

Jane Eyre's interpersonal skills are never cultivated because the concept of homosocial ties is not offered in her youth. Jane spends almost the entirety of her early life surrounded by

individuals with whom she has little in common, and with several who abuse her verbally and physically. She is orphaned at a young age, and she lives happily with her aunt and uncle until Uncle Reed dies. After this moment, Jane's life is changed drastically. She is no longer loved or even tolerated, but detested and abused by her aunt and three cousins. The novel opens with Jane being chastised by Aunt Reed: "until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and child-like disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter, franker, and more natural as it were – she must exclude [Jane] from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children" (11). Jane, clearly telling her story to her readers (she often refers to the readers directly, and calls this novel her autobiography), negatively depicts her beginnings, confirming no possibility of a homosocial relationship ever forms between her and the females in her family.

Similarly, there is little hope for a heterosocial relationship between Jane and her only male cousin, John Reed: "[he] had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and an antipathy to me. He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in a day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near" (13). Aunt Reed blatantly ignores John Reed's assault on Jane, and in turn she actually punishes Jane in the *one instance* when Jane actually fights back. Basically, her entire family believes her to be a menace, and they use this to excuse their abusive manner. She has no allies in the house, except for her handmaiden Bessie on occasion, and no person to support her every day. According to the later homosocial relationships in the novel, the eldest Brontë sister's argument seems to be that female-female friendships have two alternative outcomes: both females have a constant support system or both females are in constant competition with one another.

The former is exemplified by Jane's relationship as a young girl with Helen Burns at Lowood Institution. In a heart-to-heart discussion, Jane spouts out anger at Mrs. Reed, but Helen offers her mature, educated advice:

"I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved" [says Jane].

"Heathens and savage tribes hold that doctrine; but Christians and civilised [sic] nations disown it."

"How? I don't understand."

"It is not violence that best overcomes hate – nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury."

"What then?"

"Read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how He acts; make His word your rule, and His conduct your example."

"What does He say?"

"Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you."

"Then I should love Mrs. Reed, which I cannot do: I should bless her son John, which is impossible."

[...]

"Well," [Jane] asked impatiently, "is not Mrs. Reed a hard-hearted, bad woman?"

“She has been unkind to you, no doubt, because, you see, she dislikes your cast of character...but how minutely you remember all she has done and said to you! What a singularly deep impression her injustice seems to have made on your heart! No ill-usage so brands its record on my feelings. Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrongs. We are, and must be, one and all, burdened with faults in this world...” (61)

In this scene, Helen Burns, who is just a few years older than Jane, gives her advice based not only on her knowledge from the world at Lowood Institution, but also from her readings of the New Testament. It is remarkable how a person of Helen’s age – at this time she is around fourteen years old – can seemingly oppose the Old Testament’s angry, vengeful God, but fully accept and endorse the New Testament’s joyful, forgiving Jesus Christ, when she is very rarely around individuals who embody the characteristics of the latter.

Later in their relationship, God is once again the dominant subject because Helen Burns contracts consumption and quickly dies, once again leaving Jane alone with individuals with which she has little in common. On the other hand, much like their homosocial relationship, their recurring religious conversations take a slight turn from the moral implications of revenge to a deathbed sermon masquerading as an exchange:

“I am very happy, Jane; and when you hear that I am dead, you must be sure and not grieve: there is nothing to grieve about. We all must die one day, and the illness which is removing me is not painful; it is gentle and gradual: my mind is at rest. I leave no one to regret me much: I have only a father; and he is lately

married, and will not miss me. By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault.”

[...]

“Where is God? What is God?”

“My Maker and yours, who will never destroy what He created. I rely implicitly on His power, and confide wholly in His goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to Him, reveal Him to me.”

“You are sure, then, Helen that there is such a place as heaven; and that our souls can get to it when we die?”

“I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to Him without any misgivings. God is my father; God is my friend: I love Him; I believe He loves me.”

“And I shall see you again, Helen, when I die?”

“You will come to the same region of happiness; be received by the same mighty universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane.”

Again I questioned; but this time only in thought. “Where is that region? Does it exist?” And I clasped my arms closer round Helen; she seemed dearer to me than ever; I felt as if I could not let her go; I lay with my face hidden on her neck.

Presently she said in the sweetest tone –

“How comfortable I am! That last fit of coughing has tired me a little; I feel as if I could sleep: but don’t leave me, Jane; I like to have you near me.”

“I’ll stay with you, *dear* Helen: no one shall take me away.” (83-84)

In this moment, nothing is more important than the relationship between Jane and Helen. Jane actively seeks out information regarding the wellbeing of Helen in the days leading up to the scene – when she takes ill and disappears – and never once considers leaving her side once she sees, for herself, how truly close Helen is to dying. Given the deadliness of pulmonary tuberculosis, some scholars often question why Jane is so comfortable being *that* close to the embodiment of death – especially since she could have, and very possibly should have, also contracted the disease. She so utterly longs for a friend and mentor that she walks toward the face of death without ever considering the danger. A psychological analysis of *Jane Eyre*, in this moment, would probably show a person who suffers from depression, and is possibly suicidal. Her entire life has been lonely and empty, until she met Helen, and now her main person is literally dying in her arms.

Jane, no matter the situation, goes to Helen for advice and knowledge. She trusts that Helen will always be able to give her adequate information, especially when it involves Christianity and God. As J. Jeffrey Franklin notes,

the primary spiritual discourse in *Jane Eyre* is of course Christian, and it has a long history of criticism. Indeed, there has been a tendency to flatten all spiritual discourse in the novel into a single one, the discourse of Christianity. Charlotte Brontë apparently meant to encourage this tendency, since her “Author’s Preface” to the second edition is among other things a defense of the Christian rectitude of the text. (457-458)

Although I understand his assertion that the novel has overt Christian themes, I believe that Charlotte Brontë’s argument in this moment is that Christianity can be a unifying factor in homosocial relationships. It is no secret that Charlotte Brontë was a religious woman (as opposed

to her younger sisters, who were either ambivalent or disbelieving). Her religious themes and the second edition's preface make obvious that Christianity is something she holds in high regard. According to Emily Griesinger, "like many Victorians, Brontë was obsessed over the state of her own soul, not just in her youth prior to confirmation...but during her twenties...and on into her thirties when she wrote *Jane Eyre*. Brontë did not lose, reject, or deny her faith or the message of the Christian gospel" (30). Like many women in the mid nineteenth century, she struggled to keep her feminist ideologies intact and in harmony with her religious beliefs. Charlotte Brontë, much like Jane and Helen, not only needed to learn and speak freely, but also to have a need to define and practice "an authentic Christian spirituality, albeit on her own terms" (Griesinger 34). In the first scene, Helen's and Jane's conversation revolves around the difference between the Old Testament God and the New Testament Jesus, and Brontë stakes her claim that, in the nineteenth century, society should align themselves not with vengefulness, but tolerance and forgiveness, qualities that seem to be missing from or being questioned in this century. Here, her argument is when the relationships and human interactions are profound, as opposed to superficial – much like her thoughts about beauty and appearance – the relationship makes sense and has actual importance in a person's life.

Moving forward in her life as a governess at Thornfield Hall, Mr. Rochester's estate, Jane becomes more and more pitted against other women, especially when they are each vying for Mr. Rochester's attention. Here, Charlotte Brontë critiques the fact that women in the nineteenth century often competed with one another for a male's attention and affection. Jane decides to alter the path she is on, and also defies nineteenth century standards for female emotion and personal conduct. She cannot believe Mr. Rochester would marry a woman like Blanche,

because she is so different from Jane in wealth, appearance, and personality. Near the middle of the novel, Jane states,

I have learnt to love Mr. Rochester: I could not unlove him now, merely because I found that he had ceased to notice me – because I might pass hours in his presence and he would never once turn his eyes in my direction – because I saw all his attentions appropriated by a great lady, who scorned to touch me with the hem of her robes as she passed; who, if ever her dark and imperious eye fell on me by chance, would withdraw it instantly as from an object too mean to merit observation. I could not unlove him, because I felt sure he would soon marry this very lady...

There was nothing to cool or banish love in these circumstances, though much to create despair. Much too, you will think, reader, to engender jealousy: if a woman in my position could presume to be jealous of a woman in Miss Ingram's. But I was not jealous: or very rarely; the nature of the pain I suffered could not be explained by that word. Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. Pardon the seeming paradox; I mean what I saw. She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her. (184-185)

In this moment, Jane is a quintessential nineteenth century woman, berating another woman's character for what seems to be obvious personal gain. However, the many judgments that she makes about Blanche Ingram exemplify Charlotte Brontë's critiques of this time period.

Although Brontë herself was not exceptionally radical in her everyday life, she uses this novel as her way of saying that the requirements of women to either compete with one another for male attention and affection or spend life in spinsterhood are farfetched and ridiculous. Not only do Blanche Ingram's family and friends detest governesses, they make their feelings known, facilitating the competition between Jane and Blanche. In one swoop, the Ingrams criticize Jane's occupation and low standing in society. As much as this hurts Jane, she does not respond verbally to their judgments. Although it seems as if Jane is a mere victim in this situation, Brontë is also critiquing her, by showing that women, even those who seem "level headed", are not immune to pressures. Only one aspect seems to differentiate the two women: Jane is more sympathetic due to her lower social standing and plain appearance.

As Jane moves through her life, the theme of beauty and appearance occur often, and play a huge role in the development of Jane. Girls in the nineteenth century were judged often by their appearance, and the related proclivity to be either a spinster or a wife. From an early age, Jane seems to have little to offer to the outside world. She is surrounded only by negativity and people who tear her down. This disrespect has come to be expected from every member of the Reed family, but even the nurse and maid think poorly of her because she is not characteristically beautiful:

"...Poor Miss Jane is to be pitied, too, Abbot." [states Bessie].

“Yes,” responded Abbot; “if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that.”

“Not a great deal, to be sure,” agreed Bessie: “at any rate, a beauty like Miss Georgiana [Jane’s cousin] would be more moving in the same condition.”

“Yes, I dote on Miss Georgiana!” cried the fervent Abbot. “Little darling! – with her long curls and her blue eyes, and such a sweet colour as she has; just as if she were painted!” (29)

Brontë’s argument is that young girls are judged too harshly for their appearance. Miss Abbot immediately blames the fact that Jane is ill – and seeing the ghost of her dead uncle – on her plainness. Further, referring to her as a toad very clearly means that Miss Abbot believes her to be an ugly creature who is less human than the other Reed children.

Throughout her early life, her appearance is critiqued quite often by the women in her life, and at Lowood Institution, the girls’ appearance is suddenly critiqued not by other women, but rather by men. Therefore, not only does Brontë comment on the detrimental effects of female-female competition, she forwards this argument when she introduces Mr. Brocklehurst, a clergyman with very particular beliefs about young girls’ appearances: “And why has she, or any other [girl], curled hair? Why, in defiance of every precept and principle of this house, does she conform to the world so openly – here in an evangelical, charitable establishment – as to wear her hair one mass of curls?” When Miss Temple replies that the girl’s hair curls naturally, he retorts, “Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature. I wish these girls to be the children of Grace: and why that abundance? I have again and again intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly. Miss Temple, that girl’s hair must be cut off entirely; I will

send a barber to-morrow: and I see others who have far too much of the excrescence..." (67). First of all, Mr. Brocklehurst is quite possibly the most misogynistic man in the novel, tied in part with St. John and Mr. Rochester. I venture to say that he *is* the worst male character in the novel because at least the other two have some positive qualities. Brocklehurst, instead, only exerts his power over the women and girls in Lowood and instills a sense of fear in all of the inhabitants. Fortunately, the girls at Lowood Institution are removed from his care after his investors find out he is starving these girls in the name of religion. He believes each of the girls should appear poised and composed on a daily basis, yet he does not cultivate a healthy environment. He not only allows their body masses to reach a major low, but forces malnutrition upon them. Here, Brontë shows how society's focus on appearance can be detrimental to the physical and mental health of young girls.

Although Jane is not the girl being discussed in this scene, her "plainness" is seen as her greatest fault and the one thing that she constantly goes back to throughout the novel. For instance, when Jane is nearly finished at Lowood, at eighteen years old, she meets Bessie, her childhood nurse, again. Bessie, having moved on with her life, quite frankly tells Jane, "You are genteel enough; you look like a lady, and it is as much as I ever expected of you: you were no beauty as a child" (94). Here, Jane's only ally as a child – no matter how many times Bessie made comments such as this when she was growing up – continually brings the conversation back around to her appearance. Her earliest homosocial relationship is still crumbling, because the focus is on Jane's physicality rather than mentality; once again, Brontë's argument is that fixating on physical appearance weakens homosocial relationships, and homosocial competition based on appearance is a nineteenth century idea negatively affecting women at many stages of their lives.

The strongest of Charlotte Brontë's arguments in *Jane Eyre* is about marriage. She uses Mr. Rochester's relationship with Bertha Mason, the wife he hides from the world, as a way to critique romantic relationships and nineteenth century marriage. Romance abounds in the novel, but very few of the romances actually last long enough for Jane to even comment on. As previously mentioned, the likelihood of Jane becoming a spinster and never marrying is very high early in the novel. Readers are encouraged to be hopeful, I believe, throughout, because Brontë, although she married only nine months before her death, still believed marriage to be a viable option for a woman, given that she marry a man who respects her, and whom she respects. Marriage is critiqued in three ways in the novel; first, by the image of Mr. Rochester's actual wife, Bertha Mason, locked in the attic of a Victorian estate, going mad; second, in Jane's choice to actually marry him in the conclusion of the novel; and third, in St. John's proposal to Jane, his cousin. I say that the happy ending is a critique, because it is in this moment where Jane is, without a doubt, *equal* to Edward Rochester. It is unfortunate that he must be without one of his five senses – sight – before they can truly be equals. To me, Brontë is arguing that marriage is only truly successful if a man is degraded in a way that humbles him. When the patriarchal figure is seen as dominant to the woman, almost always is the marriage doomed, much like with Rochester and Bertha Mason.

Here, we see one of the most important critiques of nineteenth century marriage, because the image of Bertha Mason and Edward Rochester is shown first and foremost as a maddened woman in the attic:

in the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some

strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (290)

Clearly, Bertha is not meant to be seen as anything but the Other, or non-human, entity. She is subjected to daily silence, and her only companion is Grace Poole, who cannot even go near her. This solitary life is no way for anyone to live, but it is especially important that Mr. Rochester, the *male* protagonist, is solely responsible for hiding her from society. When he does place her on show for his guests – to make them believe that he is actually married to a madwoman and not simply a bigamist – he attempts to wrangle her back into her chambers:

The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors...Mr. Rochester flung me behind him: the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, athletic as he was. He could have settled her with a well-planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he mastered her arms...he bound her to a chair. The operation was performed amidst the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges. Mr. Rochester then turned to the spectators: he looked at them with a smile both acrid and desolate. (290)

In her article, ““Am I a Monster?": *Jane Eyre* Among the Shadows of Freaks,” Chih-Ping Chen posits that “the audience’s gaze ends at center stage, not on the figure but on the host. They are directed to see him as a non-violent, therefore, “civilized” keeper of the bestial body and also a wronged man” (368). Keeping the sympathy on his side of the fence is his primary goal; he doesn’t want anything – especially his actual wife – to interfere with his relationship with Jane Eyre. Mr. Rochester, by presenting himself as the keeper of this wild woman, becomes the victim in the situation. However, Brontë argues that Bertha’s madness was caused not only by

Rochester, but by the male-dominated society as a whole. The men in Bertha's life – Edward Rochester, his father, her brothers, and her father – all take advantage of her gender and her wealth for different reasons. Mr. Rochester's father, a greedy man, sent his son to Jamaica to find a partner so he would "be provided for by a wealthy marriage" (301). Bertha's father promised to give her thirty thousand pounds when she finds a suitable spouse, which seemed perfect for the Rochester men. Unfortunately, Bertha has little-to-no say in the situation, because the men in her family had decided Edward Rochester was of "good race" (301), and the union was inevitable. The possibility of mental illness was never discussed, more than likely so Rochester did not decide to forego the marriage. Feeling slighted by society, he takes out his frustrations on his innocent wife by locking her away and hiding her from the world. She is driven even madder by the isolation to the point that she turns into a less-human form of herself. The rules and regulations of the patriarchy, by which women should abide, cause irreparable damage to their minds and bodies. Mr. Rochester takes this one step farther by making a spectacle of her pain and torment in order for himself to be seen in a more favorable manner.

After his guests witness the scene with Bertha, Jane takes this opportunity to flee Thornfield Hall, no matter how much Rochester objects to the idea because he – in his mind – is single, since his wife is "mad." Jane doesn't fall for this, and she quickly states, "Sir, your wife is living: that is a fact acknowledged this morning by yourself. If I lived with you as you desire – I should then be your mistress: to say otherwise is sophistical – is false" (300). Here, Charlotte Brontë makes clear that Jane is a strong-willed woman who will not simply bow down to any man. This argument continues later in the novel when Jane's distant cousin, St. John Rivers, proposes marriage to her after parting ways with his true love, Rosamond Oliver, because she will not be a suitable missionary's wife. Justifiably appalled by this proposal – because they are

related, but mostly because he would marry a woman he was not in love with – Jane also flees his presence, an action that, as shown earlier, occurs several times throughout the course of the novel.

While Charlotte Brontë critiques marriage and romance several times in the novel, Jane Eyre's heterosocial relationship with Rochester is one of the most important and one of the most well-developed relationships, because at no point during the novel does Jane submit to him and allow herself to become a different type of woman. She is quite sassy and very outspoken throughout, especially in relation to Blanche Ingram's personality and association with Mr. Rochester. In relation to Rochester, Jane is never afraid to hold back her opinion or feelings, no matter what happens. Even when he raises his voice and tries to control her physically and emotionally, she swiftly realizes her situation and gets herself out – much like she was required to do as a child and at Lowood Institution. At no point in the novel does Jane allow a male character to undermine *her* personal authority, and she continues to subvert the patriarchal rule of the nineteenth century.

Although many different arguments occur throughout *Jane Eyre*, much of the text's focus surrounds homosocial relationships, religion, appearance, and marriage. Charlotte Brontë uses these themes to critique her society in the most honest way possible. Primarily through the thoughts and actions of female characters – Jane, Helen, Blanche, and Bertha – she explores how individuals, whether they realize it or not, are ingrained with a sense of duty, which is not always culturally unique to the time period. Unfortunately, all of these arguments do not stay intact throughout the novel's many adaptations. The alterations made in the film adaptations do not always detract from the original arguments, and some even enhance Brontë's points. Also, whether it be because of time constraints or budget cuts, many adaptations do not pass many

critics' "fidelity test," where the film is judged solely against its source-text, rather than viewed as a separate work of art altogether.

Jane Eyre is not an easily adapted novel for several reasons: it is almost five hundred pages, time moves extremely quickly, and almost every conversation that occurs between the large number of characters is important. The directors and screenwriters must make the difficult decisions about what portions of the novel are less important than others, and what sections of text can be cut to somehow fit into the standard, two-hour time. One adaptation, however, undoubtedly rises above the others to pass this fidelity test, mostly because it, the 2006 Masterpiece Classic edition, is the only one that did not attempt to include over five hundred pages of text into a two hour movie. It comes in right under the four-hour mark, and allows itself to give the text enough room to live and thrive on its own. Rather than spending time on the adaptations which barely do the novel justice, I will be focusing on the 2006 adaptation, directed by Susanna White, which stars Ruth Wilson as Jane Eyre, Toby Stephens as Mr. Rochester, and Francesca Annis as Blanche Ingram. This movie is one of the most important of our time because it does everything some scholars, and many audience members, believe an adaptation "should" do: stay true to the book, enhance rather than detract from Charlotte Brontë's political and social arguments, and present actors and actresses who are aesthetically similar to the character descriptions in the novel. I say "should" with quotation marks, because not all scholars agree that adaptations and their source novels should be identical. Some scholars, such as George Bluestone, believe the novel and its adaptation(s) are meant to be viewed separately, and treated as separate works of art, because it is nearly impossible – and a bit improbable – for the cinematizing of a novel to be completely "accurate" due to the inherent differences between novel and film.

Although the adaptation and novel are quite similar, this adaptation begins quite differently than the novel. We first see young Jane, most likely around ten years old (like in the novel), but she is immediately being physically abused by little John Reed. She is obviously miserable at the Reed household, and little good is happening in her life. The conversation between Jane and Mrs. Reed is cut from the adaptation, as is Jane's illness at the beginning of the novel, the conversation between Miss Abbot and Bessie about Jane's ordinary and plain appearance, as well as her outspoken personality being to blame for her becoming ill. These are not the only differences between the novel and its adaptation, but they are some of the most important. Her relationship with the Reeds is similar to the novel, but still quite the opposite due to the fact that the two female cousins are not present in more than a few scenes. Because Charlotte Brontë demonstrates that there is little to no possibility of Jane entering into a hetero- or homosocial relationship with any of the Reeds, it is perfectly acceptable and worthwhile to leave the Reeds out of the beginning of the movie for the most part. Had their screen time increased, and their characters been more important, Brontë's argument would have been altered even more significantly by creating the possibility of a relationship. Without them, her argument is adequately represented, or even stronger, because the director shows that Jane has no chance of a homosocial bond in her childhood, making her progression toward a relationship with Rochester even more unbelievable.

Further, the order of events is a bit dissimilar in this adaptation. Jane is only at the Reeds for ten minutes before she moves to Lowood, where she stays for only thirty minutes. Her relationship with Helen has no substance, and although she is with Helen in her final moments, the event isn't as powerful in the adaptation because the characters haven't been given enough time to develop as actual individuals. Therefore, Charlotte Brontë's focus on this homosocial

relationship for several chapters is weakened and brushed aside. Also, the importance of homosocial relationships to a young girl is downplayed; Jane has little-to-no healthy relationships in the adaptation, which makes her even more sympathetic to the audience, but her anger is also eliminated. Where she could share her anguish with Helen in the novel, giving them a closer bond, her pain becomes internalized and unseen. Probably the most important and devastating time in Jane's life barely appears in the first hour of the adaptation, and doesn't make a dent in the disappointment and resentment she has toward some of these people from her past. Some call *Jane Eyre* a simple Cinderella, from rags-to-riches, story, but without emphasis on the "rags" part of the story, her transition to "riches" – in monetary wealth and personal development – isn't quite as meaningful. Furthermore, the exclusion of Jane's relationship with Helen from the film diminishes the Christian theme in the novel. Faith in the film is downplayed, no longer showing Brontë's argument that their connection over faith is what helped create a successful homosocial relationship.

The only additional positive homosocial relationship in the novel is actually enhanced for the film adaptation. Here, the female-female companionship is between Jane and her student Adèle, but their age difference creates a dynamic unseen in the other relationships. They are not competing for the same spouse or comparing themselves to one another. Although Adèle is only a child, Jane is her governess, but the movie alters this argument by giving Adèle a more central role. This alteration suggests that a homosocial relationship between a teacher/mentor and student/mentee is one of the most important and strong relationships that can occur, because the shallow, competitive aspect is not a probability.

Here is where analyzing the thematic differences becomes difficult, because much of Charlotte Brontë's arguments occur within Jane's particular first person point of view. Since the

film does not include Jane's narration, the audience no longer receives her knowledge and her thoughts about Blanche Ingram, Rochester, or their relationship; we do not hear that Jane feels that Blanche is shallow and not worthy of Rochester's love and attention. Much of what is sacrificed by the change in perspective weakens several scenes and compromises themes in the novel. Brontë's argument that the connection, or lack thereof, between Jane and Blanche is a negative example of homosocial relationship is weaker in the adaptation because, although we can see Jane clearly uncomfortable with Blanche's undeniable beauty, we do not receive the details where Jane compares herself to this woman who, by everyone's agreement, is more "beautiful" than she, "plain" Jane. The competition between the two women is very much downplayed in the adaptation, because Jane is no longer the sole narrator, and altering the scene would be difficult because showing two women, of differing statuses, actively vying for the affection of the same man would raise questions by the onlookers. Since this doesn't occur, it is unclear whether or not the directors could create the same feeling that the inner-thoughts create in the novel.

Still, Jane, Blanche, and, as the madwoman in the attic, Bertha exemplify the pressures of nineteenth century England on homosocial relationships. Blanche is often described as being snobby and shallow; she is presented almost identically in the adaptation. She is always well-groomed, but she is very outspoken. Due to her unblemished appearance, she is able to obtain and maintain relationships with powerful, often wealthy, people. Jane, on the other hand, is shown as plain, unloved, and disrespected by her peers. Jane's plainness must be downplayed in the adaptation, because Ruth Wilson portrays Jane in the film, and she is anything but unattractive or plain. She has brunette hair and blue eyes, but she is most known for her unique, pouty top lip. Christina Cole, on the other hand, portrays Blanche Ingram, and the actress's

appearance almost perfectly matches the character's descriptions in the novel. Since these two women are supposed opposites of one another, the fact that Wilson was hired to play a "plain" character changes that detail from the novel, and Edward Rochester's choice of Jane over Blanche isn't as unexpected in the adaptation. This adaptation sexualizes both women's physicalities, and places them on the same aesthetic level. By transforming this hierarchy, the director focuses on the monetary differences between the two women, rather than their appearances.

The added sexualization doesn't stop at Jane and Blanche. Bertha is presented in this adaptation as beautiful, well-kempt, and seductive. She is tall with dark, well-groomed hair. Her clothing is pristine; she wears a gold, silk nightgown with a red robe. She, too, is shown on the same visual level as Rochester's other love interests. Seemingly level-headed, Bertha is not, at first, a danger to herself or anyone else. The audience is not introduced to her as the violent, wild, and unruly person from the novel. Here, she does not growl or attack her visitors at first glance, but actually smiles. This all changes when she sees Jane Eyre, standing in her wedding gown. Her smile turns to a snarl; she lunges forward, and suddenly begins to growl unintelligible words and sounds. By downplaying her wild appearance in the film, the essence of her madness and sympathetic nature are sacrificed for her sexuality.

After this scene, Mr. Rochester states, "That was my wife" (50:42), and details his relationship and marriage to Bertha Mason. He still refuses to take responsibility for locking her away from the world, and ultimately blames Bertha's mother for her madness:

I was married before I knew it. Before I had met her mother, who was, I found out later, at that time, and had been for many years, incarcerated in a mental asylum. And that insanity ran through the family like a black river of disease. I spent half

a day before I realized what manner of wife I had been tricked into. It was but a few weeks before the full extent of her illness was made clear to me. An illness which has grown in violence and foulness at an ever increasing pace. (Disc Two, 51:25-52:02)

By giving this pathos-driven speech to Jane and the rest of the crowd, Mr. Rochester allows himself to come out of the conversation looking much more like a hero than a villain who locked away his perfectly sane wife until she went mad. He is now the sympathetic person who must deal with this insane, violent woman from the start of their relationship. The film alters Brontë's critique on nineteenth century women and mental illness, which in turn deeply affects the characters' appearances and actions. Bertha's current poised appearance in the film no longer shows the physical turmoil on her body. She appears to be very well looked after and catered to, even though she is put away and ignored by everyone except for her handmaid. Rochester refers to Thornfield as his own "comfortable prison" (52:33), and Bertha Mason herself as a burden with whom he is stuck. He speaks as though what he is doing is for the good of everyone. Furthermore, Rochester no longer gives this speech to only Jane, as he does in the novel. Here, speaking to a multiple-person, primarily male, audience, he harangues his wife even more, and embarrasses her even further by exposing her secrets. In this moment, he actually seems more like a stereotypical Victorian male than the progressive Mr. Rochester the audience has grown to sympathize with.

Charlotte Brontë's semi-autobiographical novel makes clear her beliefs about healthy and unhealthy homosocial relationships, religion, appearance, and nineteenth century marriage through her depictions of various characters and storylines. Helen Burns' relationship with Jane throughout her time at Lowood Institute is one of the only healthy homosocial relationships in

the novel, which can be attributed to their mutual interest in Christianity. On the other hand, the most unhealthy homosocial relationships in the novel occurs between Jane Eyre and Blanche Ingram, both of whom are attracted to and fall in love with Mr. Rochester. These women engage in a female-female competition throughout the novel more so than in the adaptation, but the sentiment remains throughout both. Blanche frequently vocalizes her displeasure with Jane in both versions, but the novel much more clearly shows Jane's opinion due to the fact the novel is from her point of view, and the adaptation is forced to leave out the unspoken details given through Jane's narration.

Much of Jane's early life is eliminated, or glossed over, in Susanna White's 2006 film adaptation, which modifies several original points. Helen's move from a major character in Jane's youth to a minor character in the film removes the presence of a healthy and successful homosocial relationship. Without their bond, the original points about Christianity being a true foundation for a friendship are also negated. Quickly moving to Jane's time at Thornfield Hall, where she competes with Blanche for Rochester's affection, the only "difference" in this love triangle is that the two female characters' appearances are much more similar in the film than in the novel. The adaptation's star, Ruth Wilson, automatically alters the plain description of Jane because she is much more aesthetically distinct than the source. Since Blanche's actress is almost identical in both versions, Charlotte Brontë's use of female-female competition to show that relationships with fickle and vapid foundations – such as the preoccupation with appearance – negatively affect those involved is enhanced in the film. These two women are sexualized, and so is Rochester's mentally ill wife, Bertha. Since Bertha is not presented as wild and untamed, but seductive and poised, the argument that Rochester's decision to hide her away from the world ultimately caused her to have a mental break is downplayed, because she no longer fits the

“madwoman” image. Although the adaptation alters several of Brontë’s arguments, it maintains the essence of the story, and it is much closer to the original and ultimately passes the “fidelity” test required by scholars and critics.

Chapter Two

Emily Brontë's singular novel introduces readers to the codes of her nineteenth century society, where women, and men, were often met with standards of living which were nearly impossible to achieve. *Wuthering Heights* begins by showing the importance of homosocial relationships between women as seen in their personal conversations, particularly between Nelly and Catherine. Because of this closeness between servant and mistress, one of the more important arguments in the novel focuses on the idea of class distinction and whether or not a person should be able to move freely between classes. Furthermore, Brontë critiques the patriarchal society which works mercilessly to create weak women who must submit to the will of the men in their lives. Although Brontë's beliefs are somewhat coded throughout the characters' dialogue, the arguments are clear and present. In comparison, David Skynner and Coky Giedroyc's adaptations alter these arguments, but neither film solely enhances or detracts from the original points made. The storyline is changed in both films, sometimes enough to create entirely new situations, but nevertheless, the two directors worked diligently to eliminate enough of the novel's details to fit in a two-hour time frame, but still maintain the essence of Emily Brontë's protofeminist novel.

The tumultuous relationship between Catherine Earnshaw Linton and her trusted servant and confidant, Ellen "Nelly" Dean, is arguably one of the strongest homosocial relationships in *Wuthering Heights*. Not only does Emily Brontë share the oldest, and arguably strongest, relationship between two women, but also defends against the nineteenth century societal assumption that women, when together and gossiping, were dangerous creatures. Not only are they two women, they are from two different classes. Catherine is of a fairly high status, but Nelly is a servant, of the lower class. Traditionally, only the lower class gossiped about the upper

class, but not vice versa (Gordon 723), but the fact that the two women from different classes gossip *together*, means that the lines between social classes and social discourses become blurred. Jan B. Gordon also states that “gossip represents a kind of collective conspiracy to gain access to that which is spatially or socially hidden, and tends to be subversive” (723). Gossiping together does rebel against the societal standards. This type of class distinction was important in the nineteenth century, but in the novel, Brontë speaks out against it, and many of the most important sections of dialogue occur between Catherine, Heathcliff, and Nelly – all of whom are in different social classes.

Another argument is Brontë’s anti-nineteenth century creation of strong female characters who seem to defy all odds. Catherine is a prime example of this for she is often described as wild, and close to nature. Even her ghost and corpse make appearances several times – and there’s no way to be closer to nature than buried within it. Her unruliness at times could be seen as negative to Brontë’s contemporary readers, because when Catherine isn’t seen as wild, she’s often seen as cunning, especially in her scheme to create a “better life” for Heathcliff and herself via Edgar Linton. She is not the quintessential nineteenth century woman in her actions and attitude. By creating a character who is sure of herself, even in her downfalls, Brontë’s arguments are solidified in the text. According to Arnold Shapiro,

[Emily Brontë] has great sympathy for her characters, but she mercilessly exposes their weaknesses, as well as the weaknesses of the society surrounding them. She has a great vision of the possibilities of love, but she also quite clearly shows how the limitations of human beings and society can make that love unattainable...at the end, she gives us hope for the future, neither sentimentally nor compromisingly. She calls for a revolution – the reversal of the old ways of

thinking and behaving. She wants society to live by the values which it has always mouthed but never yet really tried. (285)

The women in the novel, Catherine and Isabella, move to the beat of their own drums. Although Catherine's personality initially seems uncultivated and Isabella's seems more refined, both women show their strength by the end of the novel, regardless of their status in society.

Isabella is the ideal example of a victim of domestic abuse, but she is also one of the most forgotten characters. She has little agency throughout much of the novel – until she flees *Wuthering Heights* – and critics often “represent Isabella as arrested in her infantile girlhood” but W. C. Roscoe, in 1857, states that “Isabella *Linton* becomes imbued with said coarseness, when in fact it is only as Isabella *Heathcliff* that this transformation takes place” (Pike 349). Although Isabella is not a major character in the novel, her femaleness supports Brontë's theme; she is first presented as weak and mild, then shown, like Catherine, as strong and abrasive. She instantly becomes enthralled with Heathcliff, runs off with him, and then proceeds to suffer in a negative relationship. She is degraded and abused – usually verbally – by Heathcliff, and she eventually runs away from *Wuthering Heights*, pregnant with his child. During the nineteenth century, women were often not allowed to ask for divorces, and taking a child away from its father constituted kidnapping, but Isabella disregards the legality of her actions. In one moment, she replaces her timid disposition with a new bold and brave one when she finally escapes the drunken, tyrannical powers of Heathcliff.

Probably one of the more important arguments Emily Brontë makes is the importance of female strength in the nineteenth century. Catherine's determination to marry a man for reasons that are important to her – but go against society's traditional views of marriage – shows a power not characteristically ingrained in females. In the following scene, most famously known as the

“I am Heathcliff” scene, Catherine and Nelly Dean are having a conversation about her love for Edgar Linton; the discussion moves forward to her secret love for Heathcliff. Here, we see Catherine voicing shallow reasons for wanting to marry Edgar Linton, such as his appearance, his wealth, and his emotions. All the while Catherine does not realize Heathcliff is standing outside her door. The dialogue is as follows:

“Why do you love him, Miss Cathy?”

“Nonsense, I do – that’s sufficient.”

“By no means; you must say why.”

“Well, because he is handsome, and pleasant to be with.”

“Bad,” was [Nelly’s] commentary.

“And still because he is young and cheerful.”

“Bad, still.”

“And because he loves me.”

“Indifferent, coming there.”

“and he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband.”

“Worst of all! And now, say how you love him.”

“As everybody loves – You’re silly, Nelly.”

“Not at all – Answer.”

“I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says – I love all his looks, and all his actions, and him entirely, and altogether. There now!”

“And why?”

“Nay – you are making a jest of it; it is exceedingly ill-natured! It’s no jest to me!” said the young lady, scowling, and turning her face to the fire.

“I’m very far from jesting, Miss Catherine,” [Nelly] replied. “You love Mr. Edgar, because he is handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich, and loves you. The last, however, goes for nothing. You would love him without that, probably; and with it, you wouldn’t, unless he possessed the four former attractions.”

“No, to be sure not – I should only pity him – hate him, perhaps, if he were ugly, and a clown.”

“But there are several other handsome, rich young men in the world; handsomer, possibly, and richer than he is...” (61)

Catherine is not portrayed in a good light here. Her desires are superficial – only caring about her own happiness and social standing – and misdirected, but nevertheless, she wants Edgar for reasons that only make sense to her. Her inherent strength is overshadowed and hidden by this trivial desire. Not only does she say she wants to marry Linton because he is handsome and rich, but she also takes that further when she says she wants to marry him simply because he is in love with her.

Catherine acts judiciously as she lists the shallow aspects of Edgar which she likes. Nelly is very clearly saying she is not thinking about this choice in a rational, logical manner. Catherine relies heavily on her emotion to tell her what she should do, but Nelly wants her to ponder the situation a bit more, simply because the reasons she gives for wanting a marriage almost perfectly mirror the desires of some women in the nineteenth century. At this point, Brontë critiques these women and their situations by showing how senseless it is for a person, especially a woman, to want to marry for simple reasons rather than more heartfelt ones. No

matter how commonplace insincere marriages were, Catherine knows her marriage to Edgar Linton would be of this kind since she actually loves Heathcliff – no matter how much this tortures and haunts her.

Her torment is further illustrated by the next portion of text, when Catherine relays to Nelly her latest bad dream about life in heaven: “if I were in heaven...I should be extremely miserable.” Nelly returns with a less-than-motherly response: “Because you are not fit to go there...All sinners would be miserable in heaven” (63). Catherine takes this statement lightly, almost ignoring Nelly’s negative sentiment about sinners, and she returns with a heartfelt speech about her love for both Linton and Heathcliff:

I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there [her brother] had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn’t have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he’s handsome, Nelly, but because 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. (63)

After this portion of the speech is finished, Nelly makes known to the readers that

Having noticed a slight movement, I turned my head, and saw [Heathcliff] rise from the bench, and steal out, noiselessly. He had listened until he heard Catherine say it would degrade her to marry him, and then he stayed to hear no farther. (63)

Since Linton is wealthy, and Heathcliff is not (at this point in the novel), Brontë’s argument demonstrates that the clash of economic interests and social class is an important factor in

nineteenth century society. She shows this by juxtaposing Heathcliff's and Linton's financial situations throughout the novel, so the audience can relate more to the characters' experiences, since many of her female readership went through similar experiences. Often, women in the nineteenth century were required to choose between a man with whom they were in love, and a man who had vast monetary value and a solid social standing. Regardless of whether or not these women had romantic feelings for the men courting them, deciding between the wrong and right spouse centered on how much the relationship would improve a woman's life and financial situation. Heathcliff simply cannot offer Catherine what she "needs" by nineteenth century standards, and Edgar Linton can. In the continuation of this earlier scene, Catherine is still speaking with Nelly about her reasoning for marrying Edgar, but her feelings are continuously wavering as she details even further how much she and Heathcliff are meant to be together, but she needs Edgar Linton's power, social status, and money to aid Heathcliff to rise to the point where she wants him to be:

"[Heathcliff] does not know what being in love is?"

"I see no reason that he should not know, as well as you," [Nelly] returned; "and if *you* are his choice, he'll be the most unfortunate creature that was ever born! As soon as you become Mrs. Linton, he loses friend, and love, and all! Have you considered how you'll bear the separation, and how he'll bear to be quite deserted in the world? Because, Miss Catherine—"

"He quite deserted! We separated!" [Catherine] exclaimed, with an accent of indignation. "Who is to separate us, pray? They'll meet the fate of Milo! Not as long as I live, Ellen – for no mortal creature. Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing, before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff. Oh, that's

not what I intend – that’s not what I mean! I shouldn’t be Mrs. Linton were such a price demanded! He’ll be as much me as he has been all his lifetime. Edgar must shake off his antipathy, and tolerate him, at least. He will when he learns my true feelings towards him. Nelly, I see now, you think me a selfish wretch, but, did it ever strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother’s power.”

“With your husband’s money, Miss Catherine?” [Nelly] asked. “You’ll find him not so pliable as you calculate upon: and, though I’m hardly a judge, I think that’s the worst motive you’ve given yet for being the wife of young Linton.”

“It is not,” retorted [Catherine], “it is the best! The others were satisfaction of my whims; and for Edgar’s sake, too, to satisfy him. This is for the sake of one who comprehends in his person my feelings to Edgar and myself. I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be, an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff’s miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I’m well aware, as winter changes the trees—my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind—

not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but, as my own being—so, don't talk of our separation again—it is impracticable; and—”

She paused, and hid her face in the folds of my gown; but I jerked it forcibly away. [Nelly] was out of patience with her folly!

“If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss,” [Nelly] said, “it only goes to convince me that you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl. But trouble me with no more secrets. I'll not promise to keep them.” (63-65)

Many women sought economic marriages, similar to Catherine's belief to marry Edgar for his wealth, because they and their families would be adequately supported throughout their lives. Brontë's twist on this, however, is that Catherine's goal is to use Edgar's money for Heathcliff, who is not her family, but the man with whom she is in love. With Edgar, Catherine knows she will never truly love him the way she does Heathcliff; this all-encompassing love, in her mind, completely negates the logicity of this possible economic marriage. Nelly attempts to discourse with her on the subject, but she becomes increasingly frustrated with the situation, because Catherine is stepping out of her gender roles in the relationship, by making economic decisions for Heathcliff.

Emily Brontë is also toying with gender in this moment, because Catherine's strength is beyond normal female gender standards. Although seemingly manipulative, she nevertheless takes an active role in Heathcliff's present and future, without first offering him a chance to be an active agent in his own life. She attempts to make the decisions for him, especially when she concludes, to Nelly's surprise, that a separation between herself and Heathcliff is “impracticable” and will never occur.

Much to her dismay, and despite the power and passion she shows throughout this entire conversation, that's precisely what happens because Heathcliff does not understand how to approach a woman who unintentionally emasculates him and makes him feel inferior. In her article "'The Situation of the Looker-On': Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*," Beth Newman – in relation to Catherine's continual demand that Heathcliff look at her face or simply in the eye – states that,

a gaze that escaped patriarchal specular relations would not simply reverse the positions of male and female, as Catherine's malign look pretends to do, but would eliminate the hierarchy altogether...In assuming the role of spectator, she seeks a "masculine" position that because she is a woman, redefines her as a "monster" or "witch." Even as a spectator, then, Catherine is locked into exaggerating the role of the woman whose gaze is dangerous to men, engaging in a kind of female impersonation or masquerade, an imitation of femininity as a construct. (1032-1033)

Newman indicates that Catherine is a firm mix of femininity and masculinity, causing other characters to not know what to do with her characteristics. She is stubborn in many situations, and no one, not even her own family or husband, can settle her down; she wants what she wants, and she stops at nothing to get what she wants. But, she is also an example of a person who does not always receive a happy ending. Nevertheless, her "happiness" is usually just outside of reach if it isn't in her grasp.

Heathcliff does not hear the remainder of Catherine's and Nelly's conversation, because he has silently fled from the room as quickly as he entered; after this night, he moves abroad and doesn't return until three years later, after he has acquired an education and earned enough

money to raise him to the same, or even a higher, status as Edgar Linton and his family. He also purchases both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. After his disappearance, Heathcliff does not seem to be the same person who fled from his love, Catherine, who seemed ashamed of that role. As time progresses, readers often believe it plausible that Heathcliff is finally the type of man Catherine wants to be with: handsome, rich, and in love with her. Here, Emily Brontë raises her argument about class distinction and mobility again when Heathcliff uses his extravagant purchases to show his rise from lower-class to upper-class. Furthermore, readers cannot escape Catherine's thoughts about Heathcliff's situation, since class and social status are almost always the only thing that Catherine discusses in the scene where she attempts to use her marriage for Heathcliff's gain. Her platonic and romantic feelings about Edgar and Heathcliff directly rival one another in purity and intensity, but she cannot seem to make the final decision about *how*, and with whom, she wants to spend her life: with a man whom she believes to mirror her soul, or with a man who appears to be her opposite – tame and polished where she is wild and unkempt – who can give her the money to fuel her happiness.

Unfortunately, some of Brontë's central arguments do not receive as much attention in the film adaptations as in the novel; the 1998 cinematic *Wuthering Heights*, directed by David Skynner, alters many details of the novel, as does the 2009 version, but the audience witnesses how each adaptation enriches some social arguments that Brontë makes in her novel and diminishes others. Emily Brontë chooses to introduce Nelly as the narrator, to help the story progress naturally, but she does not appear in David Skynner's adaptation nearly as often as in the novel. This choice by the director greatly impacts the story from the simple fact that the conversations between Nelly and the two leading characters no longer seem as significant, because their history is not described or shown, so the viewers are not as familiar with much of

the backstory that the novel has the time and space to show. Within the first five minutes of the movie, Heathcliff's love for Catherine is cemented in the minds of the viewers. Rather than allowing Catherine's and Nelly's relationship to continue as the most important homosocial companionship, as Brontë wrote, Skynner's characterization shows they mean little-to-nothing to one another, or so it seems, and Heathcliff's and Catherine's relationship is center stage. This also begins to take the agency away from Catherine, since she is rivaled as protagonist with the two men in her life. She eventually has a sort of heart-to-heart with Nelly almost an hour into the film, much farther than it occurs in the novel. This conversation happens soon after Heathcliff is accosted by Edgar and Hindley about his different attire and the fact that Heathcliff can "scrub [him]self for all [he's] worth, but [he'll] never get the darkness out of [his] skin" (28:36-28:41). Hurt by the comments from her suitor and her brother, Catherine looks to Nelly for support. Since these two women are not solidified as confidants prior to this meeting, the exchange isn't as meaningful. Nelly isn't able to really give Catherine any advice, so she isn't shown as an important figure in the other characters' lives.

The portion of dialogue where Catherine and Nelly are discussing her engagement to Edgar Linton is completely eliminated from this adaptation. The decision to remove this conversation from the script changes the power and dynamics of this scene and effectively eliminates one of the only allies, and the voice of reason, to the overall story of Heathcliff and Catherine. Nelly also isn't given the opportunity to become equal to Catherine's level. Unlike in the novel where both women are able to discuss freely the engagement to Linton, and Nelly even gives her opinion on the matter, woman-to-woman, without fear of retribution, the film undercuts this provocative relationship by excluding one of the most important conversations in the novel. Brontë allows Nelly to be a mother-figure to Catherine and her personal status is raised to that of

Catherine's. Skynner's scene shows Nelly giving Catherine advice, but the conversation is abrupt, and does not present as profound and meaningful as the scene in the novel. Nelly isn't given the screen time to plead her case to Catherine, unwittingly adhering to the societal standards of class distinction by being silenced by the upper-class.

In this film, the scene in question begins with Catherine telling Nelly she is convinced she is wrong about marrying Edgar, articulating her dream of heaven, stating, "I have no more business to marry him than I have to be in heaven" (Skynner 40:00-40:04). Like in many Gothic novels, as soon as Catherine states her realization, there is a crack of thunder and a flash of lightning; the thunder is an aid to revitalize the audience's attention, and the lightning fills the frame with white light bright enough to almost wash out the characters' faces. She continues the conversation with Nelly, saying,

CATHERINE: And if my brother had not brought Heathcliff so low, I should never have thought of it. But it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now.

NELLY: So you would leave him quite deserted in the world?

CATHERINE: No. No. And if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars... (40:05-40:27).

Where Brontë's version bleeds emotion, this adaptation is seriously lacking; the characters move little and not nearly enough time is given to the scene to build the emotion needed to achieve the same feeling that Brontë does. Here in the adaptation, Catherine is shown kneeling at Nelly's feet, looking up to her as she speaks, rather than in the novel where she is laughing and "holding [Nelly] down, for [she] made the motion to leave [her] chair" (Brontë 63). Since there is obviously no joking going on between Nelly and Catherine (perhaps stemming from the fact that Nelly is not one of the primary characters in this adaptation), the writer and director negate the

importance of conversation between Nelly and Catherine. Although cinematic versions of these novels have a time limit, typically hovering around the two hour mark, the deletion of much of this scene may have been done purposefully to save time for other aspects of the novel to be illuminated more vividly on screen.

Nevertheless, the conversation continues:

CATHERINE: ...we should be beggars. Whereas if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise and place him out of my brother's power.

NELLY: That's a terrible reason for marrying Linton.

[Catherine rises from the floor and begins walking around.]

CATHERINE: It's the best reason. I do love Edgar, but my love for him is like, it's like the foliage in the woods: time will change it. But my love for Heathcliff is like the rocks beneath. Nelly, I am Heathcliff. He's always, always in my mind. Not as a pleasure, as I am pleasure to myself, but as my own being.

NELLY: But how will you bear the separation?

CATHERINE: There will be no separation. Edgar will tolerate him. We'll be as much to each other as we always were.

NELLY: Does Heathcliff know this?

CATHERINE: [confusingly] What?

NELLY: He was here. Before. In the room.

[Catherine looks back to the spot where Heathcliff had been lurking previously.]

CATHERINE: He can't be.

NELLY: He went out when he heard you say it would degrade you to marry him.

[Catherine runs from the room, upset about the situation, and into the rain, after Heathcliff, who is fleeing Wuthering Heights via horseback.]

(40:27-41:36)

As we can see, this portion of the scene has changed vastly in the adaptation as well. Here, the discussion of Catherine using Edgar's fortune to elevate Heathcliff and expecting Edgar to simply "tolerate him" is drastically shorter. Where Nelly has almost as many lines as Catherine in the novel, here she is given less than ten, continuing to cast her as a secondary character rather than a primary one. Once again, Nelly isn't able to give Catherine meaningful advice, and the argument now presented seems to be one where women cannot be trusted to make the best decision possible in a given situation. As a strong female character in the novel, Nelly stands out among the others for her ability to speak on behalf of, and against, other characters, regardless of their gender or class. Much of Brontë's arguments in *Wuthering Heights* are exemplified through Nelly's character because her narrative is used to defy many of society's most absurd and illogical standards of conduct. But here, Nelly's importance is diminished by excluding her narration and her centrality to the story.

Analyzing Emily Brontë's critique of nineteenth century class distinction and society's focus on wealth is extremely difficult with Skynner's adaptation, since much of the novel's text is eliminated. The simple act of eliminating this much text inherently changes the meaning; Catherine's somewhat manipulative plan is brushed over, her power is diminished, and the modern audience almost completely misses the point that Catherine's unreasonable request reflects the classist stereotypes.

I believe that by making Catherine emotional and wild, Brontë actually gives her more agency because in the novel she will stop at nothing to “have her cake and eat it, too.” She never stops believing that she will be able to not only have a marriage with Linton and a relationship with Heathcliff, but that these two men will be able to bury the hatchet and exist with one another. Catherine believes this up until Heathcliff returns years later, yet she still cannot comprehend why it is not possible to have both Heathcliff and Linton in her romantic life. In some ways, it actually seems as if this adaptation reverses most of Brontë’s arguments by showing Catherine as a weak woman, who is driven by irrationality, and the adaptation paints marriage and romantic relationships in a better light than the novel does. Presenting the audience with a less dramatized version of the story negates the importance of Catherine’s agency. In the novel, Catherine’s need to help Heathcliff rise in society is often seen as an example of manipulation by the character, but in the adaptation, she is incapable of being manipulative because her strength is limited by the other characters.

Many of the arguments Emily Brontë makes in *Wuthering Heights* are also altered or eliminated from Coky Giedroyc’s 2009 adaptation. Once again, Nelly’s character does not appear as vital to the story as she is in the novel. Thus the importance of homosocial relationships in the novel is not found as much in the adaptation. In the novel, Catherine went to Nelly for many things: mentoring, friendship, advice. In the film, that option is no more and she must find another person – equal or not – to confide in. Some may say that Nelly’s disappearance from the film could be seen as an attempt to give all agency to Catherine, since she will undoubtedly need to stand up and speak for herself. However, I do not believe this to be the case. Yes, she is given every opportunity to be strong and outspoken, but many of these opportunities are disregarded by other characters who use their physicality to outshine Catherine. Edgar and

Heathcliff both speak for Catherine throughout the adaptation, and she seems to lose not only her best homosocial connection, but her voice as well.

The writers did not explicitly eliminate portions of dialogue for the movie, as in the first adaptation. They simply rearranged the portions into a new sequence, sometimes between different sets of characters. As the scene in the film progresses, Catherine turns to Nelly for a little support:

NELLY: Do you love Mr. Edgar?

CATHERINE: Of course I do.

NELLY: Why do you love him?

CATHERINE: I do is not sufficient?

NELLY: By no means. [Catherine and Nelly sit, facing one another.] You must say why.

CATHERINE: Well because he is handsome and pleasant to be with.

NELLY: [whispering] That's bad.

CATHERINE: And I shall be rich. I'll be the greatest woman in the neighborhood.

NELLY: [whispering] Bad still. However, I suppose your brother will be pleased.

[Catherine leans forward in her chair.]

NELLY: Edgar Linton is a good man and he will save you. 'Tis neither practical nor desirable for you to marry Heathcliff. And if you love Edgar and Edgar loves you, where is the obstacle?

CATHERINE: Nelly, my love for Edgar is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, but my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath.

[Heathcliff is shown placing a saddle on his horse's back.]

CATHERINE: My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries. If all else perished and he remained, I should still continue to be. Nelly, I am Heathcliff. Not as a pleasure but as my own being. I cannot think of our separation. I will not talk of our separation again.

[The film cuts to Heathcliff on horseback, looking back toward Wuthering Heights, and quite literally riding off into the night.] (Part 1, 59:49-1:02:07)

This adaptation does resurrect an equalizing conversation between Nelly and Catherine, but this is one of the only times we encounter her in the film. However, Giedroyc's decision to give Nelly more screen time than in the first adaptation solidifies their connection in this scene. She is present enough for the first hour of this film for the audience to realize when conversations between Nelly and Catherine occur, someone's life is often changed in the process. The only problematic detail is that Nelly is rarely seen after this scene, and her relationship with Catherine is forgotten.

Nearly ten minutes before this conversation, the characters' emotions are heightened by Catherine and Heathcliff kissing in the moors, followed by a scene similar to the one previously mentioned where Edgar and Hindley accost Heathcliff. Edgar does this by assuming Heathcliff is a servant, and Hindley calls him a "vagabond" and a "dirty gypsy" (50:30), which mirrors the descriptions of Heathcliff in the novel. Much differently than the previous adaptation, however, is the physical agency of Catherine in this moment. Skynner's scene shows a more timid, frozen

Catherine, but here she pushes Hindley away from Heathcliff, punches him on the arm and back, and finishes by slapping Hindley in the face, leaving scratches on his left cheek (50:40). In this moment, her anger knows no boundaries. She makes no qualms about her violence toward Hindley on behalf of Heathcliff. Here we see that Giedroyc's version of Catherine is much more like Emily Brontë's wild and untamed version than Skynner's. This also seems to give Giedroyc's adaptation more authority because of its faithfulness, in the eyes of fidelity critics, when being compared to the original text, no matter how much each adaptation diverges from the main plot.

But, one of the more interesting changes this adaptation makes actually subverts both the homosocial relationship and the earlier show of Catherine's female strength. Rather than a conversation between Nelly and Catherine, the "I am Heathcliff" scene has been transformed in Giedroyc's 2009 adaptation, and it begins when Heathcliff walks into the room with Catherine, where their conversation commences:

HEATHCLIFF: ...Cathy, what is it? What's the matter?

CATHERINE: Edgar Linton's asked me to marry him.

HEATHCLIFF: And have you given him your answer?

[Catherine shakes her head "no".]

HEATHCLIFF: But you did not say no.

[Catherine shakes her head "no".]

HEATHCLIFF: And have you considered how you will bear the separation from me, and how I will be quite deserted in the world without you? Did you consider that?

CATHERINE: You quite deserted and we separated? Who is to separate us, pray?

HEATHCLIFF: You will be Mrs. Linton.

CATHERINE: Yes. And as Mrs. Linton I can aid you to rise and place you out of my brother's power.

HEATHCLIFF: With your husband's money, you will rescue me? Do you think I can endure such a thing?

[Catherine attempts to kiss Heathcliff.]

HEATHCLIFF: You will be Mrs. Linton.

[Heathcliff walks out of the room.] (Part 1, 58:43-59:48)

Giedroyc's choice to have this scene begin as a conversation between Catherine and Heathcliff is quite inventive. Suddenly, Heathcliff is not merely a bystander in Catherine's plan to make him rise to Edgar Linton's status through Edgar Linton's wealth, but he is an active proponent of his need to become someone important in his own way. This is shown visually through an earlier conversation with Nelly, where he asks her "and when will I ever have the chance to be as rich as [Edgar Linton]?" (49:08). Creative liberties taken by Giedroyc do not clearly impede Brontë's inherent storyline; in some ways they enhance certain aspects to further bring out her critiques of nineteenth century culture, but in other ways they diminish Brontë's creation of a woman who has agency. Having Catherine and Heathcliff discussing this monetary issue directly with one another, rather than having Nelly as a sort of mediator, illustrates that women in the nineteenth century did not often make important decisions in the household. However, this also takes away from the fact that Catherine makes many plans about the males in her life, without involving the desires of these men.

As previously mentioned, the novel depicts Heathcliff witnessing this conversation, but this adaptation's choice to depict Heathcliff and Catherine having this conversation with one another gives Heathcliff all of the agency in his own social ambition. The power Catherine once had is diminished, and she must now share the power with Heathcliff, and the actor, Tom Hardy, uses his large physique and booming voice to cease all discussion on this matter. This major difference between novel and adaptation, along with the now reduced character of Nelly, has changed social arguments made by Emily Brontë, by shifting her argument that homosocial relationships have the ability to elicit power to one where stereotypical masculine traits continue to reign over female voices.

Similarly, Isabella Linton's character is quite different in this adaptation. She initially comes across as a very timid character, and during the argument between Edgar, Hindley, and Heathcliff, she appears speechless. Wide-eyed, she looks nervous and fearful when the fight is finished. The males in this scene have literally scared this woman by being brutes. None, including Heathcliff, have redeeming qualities about themselves here, because this scene is used to show the harshness of Hindley's actions toward Heathcliff *and* Catherine; although Heathcliff is always meant to be vulnerable while being brutalized by Hindley, the women are also victims of this abuse. This actually enhances Emily Brontë's argument because the audience is never left wondering with whom they should sympathize, including the female victims who were also made to watch the scene unfold. Later in the movie, Isabella is quite infatuated with Heathcliff since he has changed both aesthetically and financially. This is quite similar to how the novel portrays Isabella, but nearly midway through the movie, in a line that is *original* to this adaptation, Heathcliff is the first to state that Isabella is not, in fact, meek, and he states that "it's as though [Edgar] has a woman's gentleness, and [she has] all the fight" (Part 2, 4:45-4:50). The

addition of this line completely alters the perception of Isabella. Whereas in the novel she is quite timid until the moment she decides to leave Heathcliff for good, here – much earlier in her storyline – Heathcliff is upfront in presenting her as a person who is strong, much like Catherine. Isabella's strength, again like Catherine's, is taken away by Heathcliff. No matter the change here, Coky Giedroyc's adaptation stays true to quite a few of the novel's depictions and critiques of marriage and gender distinction in the nineteenth century.

Both of these adaptations equally, but differently, alter the arguments being presented by Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights*. Among the arguments being changed are those about homosocial relationship that blur the lines between different social standings in society, class distinction and mobility, and the power behind each gender – and those characters who seem to break all stereotypes of any gender specifically – which contributes to the characters' movements between class and class, place and place, and emotion and emotion. In the novel and two adaptations, Heathcliff is unkempt and unruly, but Linton is polished and controlled. Similarly, Catherine is untamed and uninhibited, but Isabella is more restrained and timid. The differences between these characters make the story more dynamic, since they exemplify two opposite sides of the society's gender spectrum. As the depictions of these characters transform, so do Emily Brontë's arguments. No longer are Nelly's and Catherine's conversations connected directly to the strength and independence of Catherine. Her desire to change Heathcliff's status to meet her own is underplayed in Skynner's adaptation; in Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff takes much of the power from Catherine in this situation, because he forces her to forget about her plans. The major differences in the two adaptations both work to enrich and diminish the arguments in the novel, actually working to create texts that pay tribute to, yet stand apart from, Emily Brontë's original manuscript.

Chapter Three

Seemingly written as a response to both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, Anne Brontë's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, creates an atmosphere in which women and men are portrayed in an unflattering, yet truthful, light. She uses this text to depict gossip's harm, the nineteenth century conflict between love and practicality in marriage, and the lasting effects of abuse, alcoholism, and adultery. Further, Brontë's novel investigates a woman's role in the absurdity of the nineteenth century courting process, including how she "should" act to find a respectable husband, how she "should" endure the presence of insipid and disconcerting suitors, and from whom she, and her suitor, "should" seek permission to marry and negotiate the dowry. Finally, she explores the lack of women's legal rights in the nineteenth century by showing how Helen is forced to endure nearly three years of her husband's abuse and affairs. Constantly in the mode of critique, Brontë rarely codes her arguments about female existence in the nineteenth century, and although Mike Barker's 1996 mini-series adaptation alters some of Brontë's original arguments, these detail changes do not necessarily detract from her story; in fact, they often enhance her arguments by casting them in a twentieth century light.

In the novel, Helen and Eliza compete for Gilbert's affections, but in the adaptation, Eliza's part is fairly small, pushing this homosocial competition into the background. Helen's aunt, in both, gives her very precise instructions for finding a suitable partner, and the only differences here are the settings – one is quiet and intimate, but the other is loud and public – and parts of the message are removed, eliminating the personable and motherly nature of Peggy Maxwell when she is portrayed in the film. Perhaps the most important changes in the adaptation are the ways in which Arthur Huntingdon lashes out at and mistreats his family. Also, Helen competes with Annabella for Arthur's attention, even though she is his wife and Annabella is

married to one of his friends, but in the adaptation, when Helen attempts to leave him, he physically and nearly sexually assaults her. Brontë portrays him as a functioning alcoholic, who is emotionally abusive when he's inebriated, but not as a spousal rapist. The addition of this violence overall enhances the original argument that nineteenth century drunkards were an embarrassment and danger to society.

Similarly to her sisters, Anne Brontë is overtly skeptical about the success of homosocial relationships built on a shaky and shallow foundation. Early in the novel, readers encounter several men and women who spend a good portion of their free time socializing with one another, or rather *gossiping about one another*. One woman, Eliza Millward – who is being courted by Gilbert Markham when the story begins, but is soon forgotten when Gilbert meets Helen Graham – uses her social standing in society to tarnish the reputation of the mysterious Helen, who suddenly arrives at Wildfell Hall in the middle of the night with a handmaid and a child. Eliza might have attempted to become friends with Helen, but two major reasons stop this from happening: (1) Eliza has affections for Gilbert, but Gilbert has affections for Helen, and (2) Helen's diary states clearly that she does not want to become one of the vain women with whom she has interacted and despised (123), and Eliza almost perfectly fits the bill. When Gilbert pledges to interact with Eliza in a “brotherly, friendly sort of way” (67), she meets him with fresh gossip:

“What do you think of these shocking reports about Mrs. Graham? Can you encourage us to disbelieve them?”

“What reports?”

“Ah, now! You know!” she slyly (sic) smiled and shook her head.

[...]

“Some idle slander somebody has been inventing,” [states Mary Millward.]

(67-68)

Idle slander was something women in the nineteenth century became accustomed to hearing about themselves, and their friends, at social events. This happened especially when several young women, around the same age and of the same social standing, were vying for the attention of the same man, or group of men. Since the two sisters do not give Gilbert any hint about the rumor, the issue is brought up again a few days later. Unfortunately for Eliza, one of her dear friends overhears her gossip – which now includes gossip about Mr. Lawrence, one of Miss Wilson’s possible suitors, and Helen Graham:

“Can you tell me, then, who was her husband, or if she ever had any?” [asks Eliza.]

Indignation kept me [Gilbert] silent. At such a time and place I could not trust myself to answer.

“Have you never observed,” said Eliza, “what a striking likeness there is between that child of hers and——”

“And whom?” demanded Miss Wilson, with an air of cold, but keen severity.

Eliza was startled; the timidly spoken suggestion had been intended for my ear alone.

“Oh, I beg your pardon!” pleaded she; “I may be mistaken—perhaps I was mistaken.” But she accompanied the words with a sly glance of derision directed to me from the corner of her disingenuous eye.

“There’s no need to ask my pardon,” replied her friend, “but I see no one here that at all resembles that child, except his mother, and when you hear ill-natured

reports, Miss Eliza, I will thank you, that is, I think you will do well, to refrain from repeating them. I presume the person you allude to is Mr. Lawrence; but I think I can assure you that your suspicions, in that respect, are utterly misplaced; and if he has any particular connection with the lady at all (which no one has a right to assert), at least he has (what cannot be said of some others) sufficient sense of propriety to withhold him from acknowledging anything more than a bowing acquaintance in the presence of respectable persons; he was evidently both surprised and annoyed to find her here.” (71)

What neither of these women knows is that Mr. Lawrence is surprised to see Helen Graham, but is more than likely not annoyed with her presence, or interested in her sexually or romantically, because she is his sister. She had neither seen nor spoken to Mr. Lawrence, since they were separated when she went to live with her aunt and uncle, until she returned to Wildfell Hall. Graham is her mother’s maiden name, which she adopted after fleeing her abusive husband, hence the different last names. Gilbert and Miss Wilson are startled and must mask the anger resulting from the gossip, especially since they both have feelings for those involved. Miss Wilson chastises Eliza for her gossiping, evoking the sentiment that she is not the quintessential gossiping woman in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the primary argument that Anne Brontë is making is that women often fall victim to society’s frequent, but incorrect, belief that gossip is actually harmless, but the results of Eliza and the other women’s rumor are extremely negative, and ultimately lead to Gilbert’s physical assault on Lawrence before he knows the truth about Helen’s life before Wildfell Hall.

Her diary serves as a lengthy flashback, and shows Helen as she comes of age and begins searching for a suitable partner. When she meets Gilbert, she is twenty-four years old; although

she is not “old” by any means, women in the nineteenth century knew that the “social stigma against old maids and widows made singlehood an undesirable state for many” (Phegley 17). However, “a spinster was a woman young enough to still expect to find a husband and an old maid was a woman presumed to be beyond marriageable age. While the ages were not set in stone, spinsters were likely to be under, and old maids to be over, 30” (Phegley 151). Helen seems to be an oddity because she is a widow, who may not be able to find a suitable husband because she already has a child, and a spinster, a single woman below the age of thirty. Although she is older, the probability that she is still interested in marrying another man (she does at twenty-seven years old) is still quite high.

Six years prior to meeting Gilbert, eighteen-year-old Helen wondered if she would ever even find a partner, or want to find a partner, because she didn’t feel that she would ever be loved by the same man with whom she was in love; as a response, her aunt – Mrs. Peggy Maxwell – states very clearly her beliefs concerning a young woman’s duty and courtship in the nineteenth century:

“That is not argument at all. It may be very true—and I hope is true, that there are very few men whom you would choose to marry, of yourself. It is not, indeed, to be supposed that you would wish to marry anyone till you were asked: a girl’s affections should never be won unsought. But when they are sought—when the citadel of the heart is fairly besieged—it is apt to surrender sooner than the owner is aware of, and often against her better judgement, and in opposition to all her preconceived ideas of what she could have loved, unless she be extremely careful and discreet. Now, I want to warn you, Helen, of these things, and to exhort you to be watchful and circumspect from the very commencement of your career, and

not to suffer your heart to be stolen from you by the first foolish or unprincipled person that covets the possession of it. You know, my dear, you are only just eighteen; there is plenty of time before you, and neither your uncle and I are in any hurry to get you off our hands, and I may venture to say, there will be no lack of suitors; for you can boast a good family, a pretty considerable fortune and expectations, and, I may as well tell you likewise—for, if I don't, others will—that you have a fair share of beauty besides—and I hope you may never have to regret it!”

“I hope not, aunt; but why should I fear it?”

“Because, my dear; beauty is that quality which, next to money, is generally the most attractive to the worst kinds of men; and, therefore, is likely to entail a great deal of trouble on the possessor.” (121)

Through Peggy Maxwell's speech to her niece, Anne Brontë works to show that in the nineteenth century young women were expected to prepare themselves very carefully, so they would be ready for social events or suitors who were invited into the house. Although she does not necessarily agree with Peggy, Brontë uses the aunt's advice to illustrate the irrationality of the courting process. She warns Helen about her immense beauty, which could attract the wrong type of man – one who focused mostly on obtaining an attractive, “arm candy” wife who would make him look better to his friends – because this will not lead a woman to a good life, or a happy marriage. Concerned with whether or not her aunt knows this information from personal experience, Helen quickly asks:

“Have you been troubled in that way, aunt?”

“No, Helen,” said she, with reproachful gravity, “but I know many that have; and some, through carelessness, have been the wretched victims of deceit; and some, through weakness, have fallen into snares and temptations terrible to relate.”

“Well, I shall be neither careless nor weak.”

“...Don’t boast, but watch. Keep a guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unwariness. Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention, till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of the aspirant; and let your affections be consequent upon approbation alone. First study; then approve; then love. Let your eyes be blind to all external attractions, your ears deaf to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse. These are nothing—and worse than nothing—snares and wiles of the tempter, to lure the thoughtless to their own destruction. Principle is the first thing, after all; and next to that, good sense, respectability, and moderate wealth. If you should marry the handsomest, and most accomplished and superficially agreeable man in the world, you little know the misery that would overwhelm you if, after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool.”

[...]

“I not only should think it wrong to marry a man that was deficient in sense or in principle, but I should never be tempted to do it; for I could not like him, if he were ever so handsome, and ever so charming, in other respects; I should hate him—despise him—pity him—anything but love him. My affections not only ought

to be founded on approbation, but they will and must be so: for, without approving, I cannot love. It is needless to say, I ought to be able to respect and honor the man I marry, as well as love him, for I cannot love him without.” (121-123)

Demanding that young women receive their suitors always with a smile on their faces and definitely with a cool temperament is often regarded as one of the more ridiculous requirements faced. Mrs. Maxwell believes that women who marry handsome, accomplished, superficial men are destined to live a life of misery, and a life such as this is not appropriate for her niece. Helen vows to not allow herself to become wrapped up in the outward persona of a man, and that if she cannot respect him, she cannot love him. This scene is one most heavily foreshadowing Helen’s courtship and marriage to Arthur Huntingdon; she eventually marries a handsome, accomplished man, who, rather than loving his wife and working toward their mutual happiness, spends the majority of his time yelling and drinking alcohol.

Although finding a respectable husband was often a difficult feat, once a woman believed she had found the right man, her suitor would need to seek permission from the young woman’s guardian. After the death of her mother at a young age – also very common in the nineteenth century – young Helen’s father wasn’t equipped to raise a daughter, so she was sent to live with her aunt and uncle, who would become responsible for helping her find competent suitors, marrying her to a respectable man, and negotiating and paying her dowry. When Helen pleads with her aunt for permission to marry Arthur, she makes known that she wants to marry him in order to make him into a better, sober, less wild version of himself. To this, Mrs. Maxwell states, “I must say, Helen, I thought better of your judgement than this – and your taste too. How you can love such a man I cannot tell, or what pleasure you can find in his company; for ‘what

fellowship hath light with darkness; or he that believeth with an infidel?'" (164) In this moment, Helen's aunt is overcome with motherly emotions; much like other guardians in the nineteenth century, she does not want to see her loved one end up in a dysfunctional, possibly abusive, and definitely unhappy marriage.

However, Arthur's charm overtakes Helen's thoughts and while waiting for her aunt's consent, she cannot help being blissful: "September 24th —In the morning I rose, light and cheerful – nay, intensely happy. The hovering cloud cast over me by my aunt's views, and by the fear of not obtaining her consent, was lost in the bright effulgence of my own hopes, and the too delightful consciousness of requited love" (160). Brontë seems to be saying that young women are often stereotypically blinded by the love and affections of improper gentlemen, especially when they ignore the romantic advice given by their family members.

Although Mrs. Maxwell disagrees with Helen's choice, Mr. Maxwell simply asks Helen what *she* wants and gives his blessing based on that criterion. In this moment, rather than focusing on the assumption that young women are often taken advantage of by non-respectable men, Brontë guides the readers to focus on the statement that a woman, regardless of how the marriage turns out, has the right to choose her own spouse and decide for herself whose, if anyone's, guidance she wants to ignore or utilize. Torn between the importance of familial advice and the feminist freedom of choice, Brontë juxtaposes Helen's refusal to take her aunt's advice with her friend Millicent's inability to go against her mother's wish for her to marry a wealthy man. The psychological damage caused by Millicent's mother is almost unbearable. Not only is Millicent too naïve to understand the implications of abiding by her mother's desires, she is powerless to change her future. In a letter to Helen, Millicent expresses her deep concern about her engagement:

“If I am to be Mr. Hattersley’s wife, I must try to love him; and I do try with all my might; but I have made very little progress yet; and the worst symptom of the case is that the further he is from me the better I like him: he frightens me with his abrupt manners and strange hectoring ways, and I dread the thoughts of marrying him. ‘Then why have you accepted him?’ you will ask; and I didn’t know I had accepted him; but mamma tells me I have, and he seems to think so too. I certainly didn’t mean to do so; but I did not like to give him a flat refusal, for fear mamma should be grieved and angry (for I knew she wished me to marry him), and I wanted to talk to her first about it: so I gave him what I thought was an evasive, half negative answer; but she says it was as good as an acceptance, and he would think me very capricious if I were to attempt to draw back – and indeed I was so confused and frightened at the moment, I can hardly tell what I said. And next time I saw him, he accosted me in all confidence as his affianced bride, and immediately began to settle matters with momma. I had not courage to contradict them then, and how can I do it now? I cannot; they would think me mad. Besides, momma is so delighted with the idea of the match; she thinks she has managed so well for me; and I cannot bear to disappoint her...Mr. Hattersley, you know, is the son of a rich banker, and as Esther and I have no fortunes...our dear momma is very anxious to see us all well married, that is, united to rich partners.” (208)

As noted in Milicent’s letter, she doesn’t want to marry Ralph, but she hasn’t the confidence in herself to explain this to her mother. In an age where more and more individuals were moving away from believing marriage was basically just a transaction, nineteenth century women were

often still afraid of disappointing their guardians by choosing a suitor who wasn't compatible with the rest of the family. Unfortunately for Milicent, since women were required to be proper and respectful in all social situations, she isn't able to reject Ralph Hattersley outright. Her mother's outspokenness and eagerness to marry her daughters to wealthy men overwhelms Milicent's wishes; she doesn't want to be rude to this man and she doesn't want to upset her mother, so she's stuck with an unwanted engagement. Where Helen's aunt and uncle at least allow her to voice her opinion about her suitor, Mrs. Hargrave makes the decision for her daughter. The argument here is twofold; overbearing guardians are too quick to make decisions for young women, and if a woman allows her guardian to choose a husband for whom she has no affection, the marriage will probably be cold, unhappy, and unnatural. Milicent begins this relationship with no control of her future; her mother and future husband make all of the monetary decisions and ignore what she wants. As Brontë shows throughout the remainder of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, some marriages – even when they begin happily like Arthur's and Helen's – do not end well, and some lives are nearly ruined in the process. Both Helen and Milicent are emotionally fragmented by the time their marriages wane; however, one is damaged by not listening to her family's advice and making her own decision, and the other inversely by not making her own choice and only worrying about disappointing her relatives.

Annie Swan's *Courtship and Marriage and the Gentle Art of Home-Making*, as quoted in Jennifer Phegley's *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England*, details specific duties of husbands, wives, and couples:

“A husband was expected to

1. Love his wife sincerely, ardently, supremely;
2. Prove his love by creating a happy home;

3. Provide a comfortable economic livelihood for his wife through industrious and temperate behavior; and
4. Prepare for his wife's maintenance after his death.

Likewise, a wife was supposed to

1. Love her husband above all others;
2. Obey her husband in all things not sinful;
3. Keep herself clean and neat but not extravagant in dress; and
4. Keep her house tidy and prepare meals on time.

...the mutual duties of married couples, indicat[es] that the relationship was, ideally, a partnership. Together, husbands and wives were entreated to

1. Bear and forbear with each other;
2. Conceal each other's imperfections from the world; and
3. Endeavor to increase each other's happiness." (6)

Arthur Huntingdon does not necessarily live up to the expectations of a respectable Victorian husband. Early in the marriage, on the days he is sober, he is a decent husband, and the marriage is a happy one. On other days, he picks fights with Helen to show his control and dominance. Furthermore, he openly flirts with Annabella Lowborough, one of Helen's acquaintances, *in Helen and Arthur's home*. Arthur does not care that Helen is being disrespected; not only did he flirt with Annabella when he was courting Helen, but he often hints at the affair directly to Helen. At one point, after he once again asks her why she is an emotional wreck, she confronts him about his reprehensible actions, and subtly tells him she knows about his cheating:

"I'm crying for you, Arthur," I replied, speedily drying my tears; and starting up, I threw myself on my knees before him, and clasping his nerveless hand

between my own, continued: “Don’t you know that you are a part of myself? And do you think you can injure and degrade yourself, and I not feel it?”

“Degrade myself, Helen?”

“Yes, degrade! What have you been doing all this time?”

“You’d better not ask,” said he, with a faint smile.

“And you had better not tell; but you cannot deny that you have degraded yourself miserably. You have shamefully wronged yourself, body and soul, and me too; and I can’t endure it quietly, and I won’t!” (237)

Here, Helen vows to not stay quiet about Arthur’s indiscretion, but as shown above, one duty of a couple is to hide one another’s imperfections. But is adultery really considered an imperfection? It seems as if an imperfection is an attribute which doesn’t ruin a relationship, and is probably not a conscious choice. Even into the twenty-first century, confrontation with one’s spouse isn’t an easy feat, and when Helen overhears Annabella and Arthur discussing their relationship, she is frozen:

“Ah, Huntington!” said [Annabella] reproachfully, pausing where I had stood with him the night before— “it was here you kissed that woman!” she looked back into the leafy shade. Advancing thence, he answered, with a careless laugh,

“Well, dearest, I couldn’t help it. You know I must keep straight with her as long as I can. Haven’t I seen you kiss your dolt of a husband scores of times? And do I ever complain?”

“But tell me, don’t you love her still—a little?” said she, lacing her hand on his arm, looking earnestly in his face—for I could see them plainly; the moon shining full upon them from between the branches of the tree that sheltered me.

“Not one bit, by all that’s sacred!” he replied, kissing her glowing cheek. (278-279)

Not only does this conversation happen at the Huntingdon home, but also Arthur professes his love for Annabella and his distaste for Helen. Smiling and laughing about the situation further shows his lack of understanding about how a “good husband” should behave and his lack of empathy for his wife. Regardless of their husbands’ actions, women in the nineteenth century were considered “*femmes covert*, completely ‘covered’ or represented under the law by their husbands. English common law related to marriage was based on the concept that once married, women were under the legal protection and political representation of their husbands and therefore had no independent legal existence” (Phegley 17). Unfortunately for Helen, this becomes glaringly apparent when she seeks separation from Arthur *because of his infidelity*:

“I would leave you tomorrow,” continued I, “and never again come under this roof, but for my child”– I paused a moment to steady my voice.

[...]

He vehemently swore he knew nothing about it, and insisted upon hearing what poisonous old woman had been blackening his name, and what infamous lies I had been fool enough to believe.

“Spare yourself the trouble of forswearing yourself and racking your brains to stifle truth with falsehood,” I coldly replied. “I have trusted to the testimony of no third person. I was in the shrubbery this evening, and I saw and heard for myself.”

[...]

“Well, what then?” said he, with the calm insolence of mingled shamelessness and desperation.

“Only this,” returned I; “will you let me take our child and what remains of my fortune, and go?”

“Go where?”

“Anywhere, where he will be safe from your contaminating influence, and I shall be delivered from your presence, and you from mine.”

“No.”

“Will you let me have the child then, without the money?”

“No, nor yourself without the child. Do you think I’m going to be made the talk of the country for your fastidious caprices?”

“Then I must stay here, to be hated and despised. But henceforth we are husband and wife only in the name.”

“Very good.”

“I am your child’s mother, and your housekeeper, nothing more. So you need not trouble yourself any longer to feign the love you cannot feel: I will exact no more heartless caresses from you, nor offer nor endure them either. I will not be mocked with the empty husk of conjugal endearments, when you have given the substance to another!”

“Very good, if you please. We shall see who will tire first, my lady.”

“If I tire, it will be of living in the world with you: not of living without your mockery of love. When you tire of your sinful ways, and show yourself truly repentant, I will forgive you, and, perhaps, try to love you again, though that will be hard indeed.”

[...]

“I shall complain to no one. Hitherto I have struggled hard to hide your vices from every eye, and invest you with virtues you never possessed; but now you must look to yourself.” (281-282)

Here, Helen has no other choice but to internalize her anger and desperation; she does not beg for her child, but rather decides to stay with Arthur, as strangers. This was very typical of Victorian marriages in disrepair. Legally, the man claimed all the power in the marriage, specifically over his wife’s and his children’s lives. Since the Custody of Infants Act of 1839 had not yet passed and she has no legal right to take her son with her, Helen is forced to live, tormented by her husband’s depravities. As previously mentioned, women had little-to-no rights distinct from their husbands’; a man almost always spoke for his wife, and very few people would believe a woman who voiced her concerns about her husband. It is interesting that Arthur is so concerned about how his public appearance would be harmed if Helen decided to discuss his misdeeds with her friends and family, who would in turn share this information with their friends, and so forth. His reputation could have been ruined from the scandal of his affair. For the rest of their short-lived marriage, Arthur worries about his true character being unveiled, and Helen worries about the future for her prepubescent son. A clear double standard is exposed here where he can *legally* continue on his own sinful path as an adulterer and an abusive alcoholic, but she is unable to change her situation. The law forbids her from being happy or keeping her child safe.

Anne Brontë, having lived with an alcoholic for most of her life, believed excessive consumption of alcohol can ultimately ruin a drunkard’s life, even if they are functional. Although Helen doesn’t think much of Arthur’s alcoholism in the beginning of their relationship, she becomes more and more concerned with how his extreme drinking affects their lives after birthing his child. Women in the nineteenth century weren’t necessarily able to stop their

husbands from their bad behavior, but Catherine Gilbert Murdock argues that “the mother, daughter, or wife of a drunkard could thus be considered a failure, for she had failed to perform the most important duty assigned her by society and ultimately by God: to keep her family pure and temperate. Yet to admit this failure would upset the entire structure of nineteenth century femininity” (qtd. in Torgerson 33). Without wanting to upset the balance of her home life, especially if the drunkard is violent, a woman might have had little choice or ability to stop his bad behavior. As noted by Swan, it was a woman’s duty to not call attention to her husband’s wrongdoings, regardless of how harmful they were. Calling attention would embarrass the family, and that was an unforgivable act. Furthermore, Arthur is continually surrounded by his friends who, by all accounts, drink as much as he does, but where their fun and games end, the abuse begins.

Even though Arthur is the adulterer and abuser, the Matrimonial Causes Act (or Divorce Act) wasn’t passed until 1857, three full decades after the publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This act stated that a man (such as Lord Lowborough) could “sue for divorce based on his wife’s adultery alone,” but that a woman (Helen) “could only sue for divorce if her husband committed adultery compounded by desertion (for more than two years) or brutality” (Phegley 20). Clearly Helen’s situation fits perfectly with the laws in the future, but at the time she is living, a man could still leave his wife, but an “escaping” woman who “kidnaps” her own child to get away from abuse had to do so secretly or risk imprisonment. Women were often willing to go to extremes to remove themselves and their children from these poisonous situations and alcoholic spouses. Perhaps by Victorian standards Helen Graham was not a successful wife, but *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* shows her decision to covertly remove her son in the middle of the night from this dangerous environment, however illegal, makes her a successful mother. The

situation here echoes Isabella's from *Wuthering Heights*. Both women show their strength and independence through fleeing their abusive husbands in the dead of the night with their children. Females demanding safety for themselves and their offspring is a theme often portrayed by the Brontë sisters, demonstrating that in a world where women had few individual rights, they needed to make difficult choices, such as whom to marry, when to marry, and when to separate or divorce.

Many of Anne Brontë's arguments are carried over into Mike Barker's 1996 BBC three-part television serial adaptation of the novel. It stars Tara Fitzgerald as Helen, Rupert Graves as Arthur, and Toby Stephens as Gilbert, and these actors fit the character descriptions and personalities quite nicely. Although some of the arguments present in the novel remain intact through the adaptation, quite a few changes and variations are presented, especially when dealing with the narration style and the large number of characters in the novel. The adaptation has many confusing and unexplained flashbacks – not long flashbacks, or full scenes, but quick snippets from Helen's past to make the audience truly wonder *who* this mysterious woman is. The flashback technique in the novel is quite different and more cohesive. The purpose of the flashback is clear from the beginning of the diary portion of the novel, but the flashbacks are not adequately introduced or discussed in the film. One very apparent alteration is that the novel begins with Gilbert Markham narrating the story through a letter to his brother-in-law; he quite literally takes the readers back in time to when *he* first met Helen Graham. The adaptation, however, begins near the end of Helen's journal entries when she wakes young Arthur in the middle of the night and sneaks him away from his father. The two characters move swiftly through the night and into the morning, and the audience knows they are clearly running from

something or someone. What she finds at Wildfell Hall is a somewhat interesting, yet familiar, handsome man and malevolent women who remind her of people from her past.

In the film, Helen quickly finds out how prying the women in Linden-Car – the village near Wildfell Hall – can be, especially when giving her unwanted parenting advice: leave your son with a servant to attend our party because a boy needs to be independent of his mother’s presence. Helen doesn’t take kindly to this, and her coldness gives the women more fuel for their gossip, with one even saying “You seem determined to be a stranger to us. I suppose you must find us all very dull.” When Helen apologizes, she returns with, “Let’s not apologize. There’s nothing I love more than a mystery” (10:15-10:26). It seems that she unintentionally brought more attention to herself by not wanting the village inhabitants to focus on her. Unlike in her youth, she wants to be in the background while living at Wildfell Hall, but the women appear genuinely interested in getting to know her and becoming friends. But this doesn’t last very long when rumors begin circulating about the possible father of young Arthur, where Helen comes from, and what her unintentional and unexpected relationship with Gilbert Markham is.

Not long after she sends the Markhams away from her house we see Eliza and Rose gossiping about Helen again. They attract Gilbert’s attention and attempt to draw him in with scandalous information:

ROSE: Have you heard these shocking rumors about Mrs. Graham and Mr. Lawrence?

GILBERT: What rumors?

ROSE: You haven’t heard?

GILBERT: [Clearly confused] No.

ELIZA: I daresay it may only be idle gossip.

GILBERT: I daresay. (32:46-33:02)

During this exchange, Gilbert glares at the two women. His dejected look spooks Eliza, who runs home to her father. After she is gone, Gilbert gives his current feelings about the woman he's been courting for months:

ROSE: You were very rude to Eliza Millward.

GILBERT: She is a malicious scandalmonger.

ROSE: You didn't always think so.

[Gilbert scoffs and rides away on his horse.]

(33:17-33:25)

In the novel, however, this scene is given quite differently. Shown from Gilbert's point of view, he goes into this conversation wanting to be only friends with Eliza. Still wanting to earn his affection, Eliza is the one who presents him with this "shocking" rumor about Helen (which isn't even very shocking – just speculative). Here, however, his sister is the one who tells Gilbert about the rumor, not Eliza; in fact, Eliza's character in this moment is almost opposite of her character in the novel. Her meekness doesn't last long, and in the very next scene, at a social gathering – perhaps a lunch or dinner – Eliza picks up where Rose left off earlier:

ELIZA: It's as if they were perfect strangers.

GILBERT: Who?

ELIZA: Mrs. Graham and Mr. Lawrence.

GILBERT: What?

ELIZA: Oh, Gilbert, you can't pretend to be ignorant.

GILBERT: [raising his voice] Ignorant of what?

ELIZA: Shh! Not so loud. [She looks down at her lap.]

GILBERT: Well?

ELIZA: Have you observed the striking likeness between that child of hers and—
[she and Gilbert both look at Mr. Lawrence, who is holding young Arthur on his lap. Gilbert sighs and shakes his head.]

ELIZA: What have I done to offend you? I wish I knew.

GILBERT: Drink your tea, Eliza, and don't be so foolish. (33:45-34:25)

Once again, this scene is altered from the original by excluding Miss Wilson, Mr. Lawrence's betrothed, from the conversation. In the novel, Eliza offends Miss Wilson, who lashes back and goes into a discussion of her love and relationship with him, but in the adaptation, Miss Wilson's attitude is disrespectful to Helen from the beginning, without cause or reason. She accosts Helen for painting as a trade rather than simply as an accomplishment, then silently leads Eliza to believe in a relationship between Helen and Gilbert, as well. In small nineteenth century villages such as this, where everyone knows one another and everyone shares romantic interests, society believed rumors about a woman's immorality, whether or not there was any basis of truth to be found amongst the lies.

As the adaptation moves back into Helen's past, rather than a diary or journal that's been kept and written in for years, her history almost presents as a direct letter to Gilbert. She begins when she is around eighteen years old, discussing a woman's duties and preparing to begin courting with her aunt; however, in the novel this conversation happens around the fire, when her uncle is away. It is a quaint scene, and very intimate. In the adaptation, this scene takes place at a very large social gathering during the courting season in London, where people are dancing, drinking, and finding possible suitors for themselves or their children. The dialogue is quite different here compared to the novel,

MRS. MAXWELL: Always remember to receive every attention coldly and dispassionately till you have ascertained and duly considered its worth.

HELEN: Yes, Aunt.

MRS. MAXWELL: I fear, my dear, you have rather too much beauty for a young girl. I hope you may never have cause to regret it.

HELEN: Why should you fear it, Aunt?

MRS. MAXWELL: Beauty invariably attracts the very worst kind of men and could lead to a great deal of trouble.

HELEN: Have you ever been troubled in that way, Aunt?

MRS. MAXWELL: Believe me, Helen, matrimony is a serious thing. (56:10-56:38)

Although the sentiment is similar, the characters' personalities in the film do not necessarily equal the dispositions in the novel. Before, Peggy Maxwell exuded a maternal confidence, but that is missing from the adaptation. She is much colder, but also doesn't give her niece as many rules or advice for being successful in, and smart about, this courting season. Brontë's original divided argument between wanting women to make their own decisions and recognizing when some advice should be taken is exploded in this moment, because Peggy's taciturnity does not allow for much advice in the first place. The one constant protective action is Peggy's work to keep Arthur Huntingdon away from Helen by setting her up with other men, but much like in the novel, she doesn't shy away from her feelings; unlike before, this heart-felt conversation actually occurs in a more intimate setting, with Mrs. Maxwell helping Helen take down her hair after that night's event:

MRS. MAXWELL: You could not have found a man with a worse reputation.

HELEN: He behaved as a perfect gentleman to me.

MRS. MAXWELL: Naturally. His sort always do at first. Always depend on a rogue for a beguiling manner.

HELEN: What is a poor beguiling rogue to do, Aunt? If every woman followed your advice, society would soon come to an end. (59:16-59:33)

Not wanting to discuss the man further, Mrs. Maxwell changes the subject to another one of the night's suitors, a gentleman (almost twice Helen's age) named Mr. Boarham, who, like his name, is very dull and boring, and nearly the opposite of Arthur personality wise, but professionally they are very similar in their accomplishments. The exchange between Helen and her aunt is quite lovely, and although the aunt wants to find her niece a wealthy man to marry, she battles between wanting to choose the "right" man for Helen and wanting to let her choose a respectable husband for herself. Helen could no longer avoid her romantic interest in Arthur, no matter how much she was warned about him and his "type" by her aunt.

As in the novel, when he begins seeing Annabella, Arthur's personality changes drastically; rather than being the loving husband he should be, he is distant and cold. Much like in the novel, he travels quite frequently, to "get away" from Helen and his son; who his companion is on these trips, readers and the audience don't know, but it is hinted at throughout the novel and adaptation that something – romantic and/or sexual – is happening between Annabella and Arthur. The adaptation's depiction of the night when Helen finds out about the affair is quite similar to the novel, as well:

ARTHUR: We can't stay here.

ANNABELLA: I know, I saw her. I saw you kissing her.

ARTHUR: I couldn't help it. And besides, [Arthur throws Annabella against a door under an outdoor staircase and kisses her.] haven't I had to watch you kissing your dolt of a husband one hundred times?

ANNABELLA: Yes. But you still love her, don't you?

ARTHUR: Not at all, I swear by all that's sacred. (1:39:30-1:40:00)

Standing on the stairs, Helen overhears the conversation below. Obviously distraught, she runs from the situation, crying. No matter how poorly her husband treats her, Helen cannot help but continue to love him and care for him, his house, and his child; she is being the quintessential dutiful Victorian wife. Well, until she finds out about his sexual indiscretions with one of her "closest" friends.

In an eerie turn, Helen confronts Arthur in a dark, candle-lit room (even he wonders why she's sitting alone in the dark). Solemnly, she tells him that she wants to leave him, with her money and her son:

HELEN: I would leave you tonight, and never again come under this roof, but for my child.

ARTHUR: What are you talking about, Helen?

HELEN: You know full well. I saw you and heard you tonight. Both of you.

ARTHUR: Ah. Well, what of it?

HELEN: Let me take my child and what's left of my money, and go.

ARTHUR: Go where?

HELEN: Anywhere we can be safe from your contaminating influence.

ARTHUR: No. God damn it, I won't. No.

HELEN: Let me just take my child, then.

ARTHUR: No, not you, not him, not the money, nothing. You are my wife. Do you think I'm going to be made a laughing stock because of you?

HELEN: I have created no scandal.

ARTHUR: And will not, either.

HELEN: That is up to you.

ARTHUR: Don't threaten me. [Helen and Arthur stare at one another. Arthur grabs Helen and throws her up against a wall by her throat.] And with my body, I thee worship. [Kissing and choking her.] Remember, Helen? You promised.

[Arthur throws Helen onto the ground, pulls her dress up, acts as if he is going to rape her, then decides against it.]

HELEN: I never want you to touch me again. (1:40:58-1:43:23)

Two major changes between this scene and the one in the novel are the addition of Arthur's use of "God damn" and Arthur's attempted rape of Helen. Anne Brontë, even writing and publishing as Acton Bell, would not have used that curse word in the mid 1800's in a novel. Using such a term in the midst of an argument with Helen creates a more rancorous version of Arthur than in the novel. Although the term has been used since the fifteenth century, I just can't imagine a female Victorian author adding that to her manuscript. The same can be said about the attempted rape scene. No matter how often Arthur is described in the book as violent, or acting violently toward Helen, the thought of spousal rape didn't occur to me until watching the film. As Jill Elaine Hasday notes in her article, "Contest and Consent: A Legal History of Marital Rape," "a husband's conjugal rights became the focus of public controversy almost immediately after the first organized woman's rights movement coalesced in 1848. Over the course of the next half century, feminists waged a vigorous, public, and extraordinarily frank campaign against a man's

right to forced sex in marriage” (1377). Although the story is set in the mid 1820’s, Anne Brontë’s novel was published in 1848, and the adaptation was released in 1996. So, the novel was written just as feminists were beginning to call for change in relation to female sex and sexuality, and according to a 1990 article in the *New York Times*, the adaptation came out merely a few years after the large push from men, women, and the Law Commission to make spousal rape a criminal act.

The nineteenth century was a time of extraordinary change in society, particularly in relation to women’s rights, their societal duties, and their role in and out of a marriage. Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* presents readers with clear arguments about competition in homosocial relationships, the (un)importance of courting season, poisonous marriages due to alcohol abuse and adultery, and the extreme, often illegal, actions a woman will take to keep her family safe. Helen Graham’s relationship with Eliza can hardly even be described as such. More appropriately, it can be seen as merely a mostly one-sided competition – Eliza competing with Helen, and Helen ignoring Eliza – for the attention and affections from one man, Gilbert Markham. Furthermore, she shows how, although a guardian’s heart may be in the right place, a young woman needs the independence and freedom to choose whomever she wants as a husband, whether he is “respectable” or not. Arthur is not suitable by Peggy Maxwell’s standards, but Helen’s love for him wins in the end. After enduring a horrible marriage to a drunkard – which was common in the nineteenth century – and an adulterer – which was not as common, due to its creation of rumors and bad reputations – Helen Graham is forced to steal away in the middle of the night, with her child, while her husband sleeps, so that young Arthur may be safe throughout life. Although many of these same arguments are presented in Mike Barker’s adaptation, the changes that occur more often enhance Anne Brontë’s arguments rather

than detracting from them. For instance, creating a scene in which the “hot button issue” of the time, spousal rape, is at the forefront not only connects the past with the present, but it also shows how, although nearly fifteen decades separate the two texts, the degradation women face in harmful relationships actually creates stronger beings who are forced to take action to protect themselves, their children, and their bodies.

Conclusion

Although the adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* alter several of the central and most critical arguments in the texts, these changes are not necessarily indicative of the film's accomplishments. Since Robert Stam questioned in 2000 whether or not a film could realistically be completely faithful to its source text, many film critics solely base an adaptation's success on how much of the novel is eliminated in the filming process. Some critics believe a cinematized novel should be identical to the source, and others scrutinize films on their own merit, without directly comparing them to the original. In this thesis, I do the former by analyzing three novels by the Brontë sisters to answer two major questions in adaptation theory: does the addition, deletion, or alteration of scenes and arguments create an unsuccessful adaptation, and do these changes enhance or detract from each source novel's arguments.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* focuses on healthy and unhealthy homosocial relationships, religion, society's preoccupation with appearance, and the dangers of marriage in the nineteenth century. Although the adaptation sexualizes the female characters and eliminates the arguments about religion, it overall enhances the arguments in the novel by modernizing them. The writers, director, and editors of the 2009 adaptation worked around the novel's first person narration, but in the process Jane becomes much more of a victim of the other females' hatred rather than a victim of society's irrational beliefs about womanhood.

On the contrary, both of the adaptations of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* largely detract from her arguments about homosocial relationships, class distinction, and strong women. David Skynner's 1998 adaptation rarely features Nelly, so she does not become an equal to Catherine, and they do not have a meaningful relationship. The lines between the classes are

blurred in the novel, but are very distinct in the film, making her argument that individuals should be able to move between social classes easily obsolete. Further, Coky Giedroyc's 2009 film reverses many of Brontë's arguments; Nelly is present, but her part is not extremely important; the importance of money is more overt. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar to use his money to help Heathcliff's rise is nearly eliminated, because Heathcliff himself is much more powerful physically and vocally. Her strength is diminished, and Isabella – because she chooses to leave Heathcliff and fight against the patriarchy – is portrayed as much stronger than in the original.

Lastly, Anne Brontë's arguments about gossip's harm, the conflict between marriage for love and practicality, and the effects of abuse, alcoholism, and adultery in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are neither solely enhanced nor detracted from in the 1996 adaptation. Gossip is much more important to the story in the novel, affecting both women and men on a physical and emotional level. Milicent's domineering mother is nonexistent from the film, omitting half of Brontë's argument about the dangers of overbearing families. Finally, the adaptation enhances her arguments about abuse by showing that alcoholism leads to domestic abuse and adultery. In the film, however, Arthur Huntingdon attempts to rape his wife – an act that was not illegal in the nineteenth century – but he also emotionally abuses her by forcing her to endure over three years of marriage before she steals off into the night. By incorporating a more modern and violent scene, Helen's torment is shown much more blatantly.

None of the adaptations examined in this thesis are completely faithful to their source texts, but this is not to say they are failures as adaptations. As we've seen throughout these three chapters, many of the arguments are enhanced *through* the modernization of them, but many are detracted from *because of* the modernization. In *Jane Eyre*, the sexualization of every adult

female character creates a more enriched and dramatized argument about preoccupation with appearance in the nineteenth century. Much of the story remains intact, leading me to the conclusion that it is an effective adaptation when compared to the novel. Furthermore, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is also a success, because not only does the story itself withstand the cinematization process, but also the additional modernized detail of the attempted spousal rape scene reverberates with modern audiences, especially feminist audiences. On the other hand, the two adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* are not successful, because the modernization reverses many of the original arguments. In the 2009 adaptation, the conversation between Catherine and Heathcliff, that was never meant to be between these two characters, detracts from Emily Brontë's creation of strong female characters. Although they are all excellent-quality films, when viewed critically from a fidelity perspective, *Jane Eyre* and *Tenant* retain the qualities and essence of their source text, but the *Wuthering Heights* films do not in comparison.

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