**Visualizing the Cinema through Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre***

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Abstract

*Jane Eyre* is a novel that has been reviewed by a great number of critics from various perspectives. The novel has also been adapted several times in various decades and countries, in this way proving itself relevant to diverse audiences. Yet despite *Jane Eyre*’s visual adaptability and its distinct imagery, Charlotte Brontë’s 1847 novel has been largely overlooked for its proto-cinematic language and influence. In the tradition of feminine exclusion in the English/American canon, *Jane Eyre* is a case for not just literary marginalization, but for the misinterpretation of original texts by high theorists of the twentieth century. This paper proves Brontë’s work to be more apt in explaining personal and social development through its visual language than the psychoanalysts who were influenced by her work. It will do so by first proving the proto-cinematic qualities of *Jane Eyre*, then deconstructing the psychoanalytical arguments used to explain both literature and film.

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Dear Future Honors Students,

If you are like most undergraduates in the Honors program, you might have moments of doubt in which you feel like you cannot possibly finish your thesis in the next one, two, or infinite years. I have also felt that way at times. The body of the manuscript was looming over my last semester, casting a long shadow over lazy Saturdays and the occasional weeknight Netflix treat. I walked around telling everyone not to complain to me about *their* homework because I have only one semester to write *my* senior thesis.

And yes, it was hard. I had some late nights and a lot of it just was not as fun as I expected it to be when I picked my topic the fall of junior year. This leads me to my first piece of advice: pick something you’re interested in enough to actually spend some time discovering. That’s right, *not* something you already know the answer to. If you don’t want to cry tears of boredom between now and graduation, do not pick something you already know everything about. I know, it’s hard to start thinking about your thesis two years in advance, but there’s some logic behind our honors advisers’ timetable. The best questions don’t get solved in one semester: they take lots of reading, research, time, and dedication to even begin to make sense. But the discovery aspect is what makes those small epiphany moments that much more special over those two years.

This leads me to my discussion on time management. Here’s my tip: procrastinate. But procrastinate a bunch of times on little tiny goals that you set yourself. Don’t procrastinate on the whole thing (come on, that would just be awful advice). But it’s okay to wait until the last minute on a weekly goal, or even a daily goal. Nothing makes my fingers fly across the keyboard faster than knowing that I have less than two hours to hand something in, even if I’m just bringing it to my friend or adviser to glance over.

Read what you’re interested in. Caution: this also requires you to set aside some “cushion room,” but it’ll be worth it. If you’re really intrigued by the first few pages of an article or book, and then realize it’s not something you actually need for your argument, read it anyway. If you’re learning something you care about, it won’t be a waste of time. Very often, you’ll find later on that it fits somehow into your paper. Also, when reading, always keep your notes in the same place. Keeping your folders organized, whether digital or analogue, will keep you moving quickly along when you realize you need to go back and cite something you read five months ago.

A motivational piece of advice: don’t give up. This is followed by the sub-pieces of advice: don’t change your thesis topic and don’t drop the Honors Program. Is your thesis itself going to change? Well mine changed just about every day I sat down to write it (and will continue to change if I try to prepare it for publication) but that’s not bad. It’s like that very wise writing quote by E.L. Doctorow that aspiring novelists like to post as their desktops: “Writing is like driving at night in the fog. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.”  Honestly, your advisers probably do not want you to write like this. They probably want you to develop your argument in an outline with roman numerals and bullet points. And there’s a lot of reason in that method. That’s where you can see the argument laid out in all its logical glory. But if it comes down to either writing your thesis with the headlights on, or not writing it at all, you’re better off doing the former. Don’t forget you can always go back and outline what you wrote after you’re done so that you can retroactively look at your logic and restructure it in a way that makes sense.

This brings me to my second regurgitation of overly used writing wisdom, and my last piece of advice: “Kill your darlings.” This does not mean kill your whole paper or your topic, just the paragraphs, points, and fancy sentences that serve no purpose. Once you realize how much smoother the paper flows after they’re gone, you won’t feel bad about killing them anymore.

So take a deep breath and get started. Don’t be like me and let that shadow follow you all semester. Go into it with a spirit of discovery, and you’ll be proud of what you create. Good luck!

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my first thesis adviser, Dr. Amy Shore, for her continued guidance before, during, and after this writing process. I would never have even wanted to write a paper that uses film theory if she had not intrigued me with the subject in my first few years as a student at Oswego. Amy, thank you for always pushing me to be curious and courageous.

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I would also like to thank the directors of the Honors Program who I have worked with over the past seven semesters: Dr. Robert Moore and Dr. Gwen Kay. Without their structure, guidance, and motivation, I would never have thought this thesis possible. Thank you, Dr. Moore and Dr. Kay, for cheering me through this semester and answering all of my last minute questions.

**Reflections**

Honestly, writing this paper was harder than I thought it was going to be. There were some unforeseen challenges, but also some things that fell into place nicely. There were also several things I wish I had done differently, but a few challenges that I can commend myself for handling well. Now that the entire experience is over, I can see how much I have personally grown over the past year-and-a-half, both in my understanding of literature and my time management skills.

Most of my unforeseen challenges consisted of my running out of time to keep up with the schedule I first created at the beginning of junior year. At this time, I did not know that I would be graduating a semester early. In fact, I figured that I would be at Oswego the full senior year, spreading out my hard classes over the last two semesters and taking some fairly easy courses in between. This did not happen. Instead, I saw a chance to save money by graduating early, so I took it. While I am overall happy with this decision, it did add some stress to the thesis process, especially since I did not make this decision about early graduation until the end of my junior year.

What was not difficult for me was reading the texts on my reading list. I thought that the material would get boring after a while, but luckily, I never felt this way. I only became more interested in the subject matter. It was particularly rewarding to notice knowledge compound on itself. I feel like I learned a lot not just about *Jane Eyre* or Charlotte Brontë, but about the Victorian Era itself. The secondary research was fascinating to read, which, at least at first, made the writing fun as well. What made it less pleasurable was the pressure I began to place on myself as I got closer to the December deadline. I began to feel stressed every time I sat down to do my readings, make an outline, or even *think* about my thesis. This was particularly bad over the summer, which I had promised myself would be consumed by thesis-related activities.

These summer ambitions did not last long. In fact, this is from where most of the “I wish I had done this differently” moments derive. It is not so much that I blame myself for neglecting my thesis all summer; I was busy working a full time job. What I can blame myself for is being too scared of even thinking about the thesis that I neglected to make a plan for how it would fit into my last semester. If I had only addressed my problem earlier, I would have saved myself a lot of stress, if nothing else. This brings me to another thing I wish I had done more of: self-care. Many of the things I enjoy I felt I could not do without worrying about the amount of work I had to complete at home. In the future, I need to better organize my time so that when I do participate in self-care activities, I am able to effectively de-stress and re-energize.

That being said, there were a lot of challenges in the process of writing this thesis that I can be proud of handling well. For example, I found myself keeping well-managed notebooks and documentation of sources. This is something that I often struggle with, as anyone who has seen my personal desk at home might imagine. I made an annotated bibliography in the spring and continued to add material to it until the final draft of my paper, when I arranged the sources in compliance with MLA style. Having a short explanation of the piece right under its citation made finding the right source for the right time easy. Another thing that I did well with is sticking to my topic, but also letting my thesis change as I discovered new things. Although this slowed the writing process down as I revised my argument several times, it is a way that makes sense for how I process my thoughts. It was helpful for me to see my argument laid out on paper, even if I decided I wanted to go in a different direction. However, this method would have been even more successful for me had I given myself some extra time to write the actual body of my essay.

Now I would like to outline how I will handle similar projects in the future based off of this Honors Thesis experience. In the pre-writing stage, I will begin by finding a topic that can easily interest me for a very long period of time. Then I will talk to colleagues and advisers about what material I should be reading to prepare myself to form an opinion on this subject. I will also secure one or two of these advisers as long-term coaches who I can stay in touch with over the process (having that support from Dr. Shore and Dr. Coll was very important).

As I dive into my work, I will keep a binder and notebook to keep any readings I want to print, highlight, and take note of. I will also keep a folder online for electronic documents. As I assess the speed at which I am able to digest the work for this specific project, I will make a schedule that is realistic to my goals. I will also create a working bibliography the way I did with this Honors Thesis.

In the actual writing stage, I will give myself many small deadlines. I learned from this project that my procrastination problem is bigger than I previously realized. In the future, having small goals will keep me working to maintain the standards I have set for myself so that I am not writing the whole thing in a very short amount of time.

The most important thing I learned about this project that I will carry into the future is how creative an academic paper can and should be. I began to feel less pressure with this paper once I allowed myself to think outside of the box; really questioning my readings and becoming the theorist myself. In the future, I will bring this spirit of curiosity and creativity to whatever work I complete.

**Introduction**

It is when Jane, looking out of the dark castle’s window, sighs, “I wish a woman could have action in her life, like a man,” that it becomes clear why a novel written in 1847 is being reenacted by movie stars in 2011, despite the dozens of prior film adaptations made during the past century of cinema. In the 2011 version of *Jane Eyre*, the audience has already seen in a flash forward that Jane will be bursting out of Thornfield Hall, having action in her life just as she had wished. But besides being a highly quotable line in a commodified industry of words and pictures, Fukunanga’s script also serves as an example of misremembering: Nowhere will you find this line in the original text.

This is not to say that every generation has revisited the material looking for a pugnacious heroine. Robert Stevenson crafted his 1943 *Jane Eyre* to highlight Orson Welles as Mr. Rochester, leaving the diminutive Jane cowering in the shadows of that big, Gothic set. Despite the film’s warped message, the New York Times reviewer’s main criticism was Welles’ mumbling (Crowther).

And so it goes with this novel that leaves so much room for interpretation that it can be at one time called a Gothic romance, a Victorian love story, a lost piece of Romanticism, a gold mine of proto-feminism, or a regurgitation of its time’s patriarchy and colonialism. Although contrasting the societal conditions during the creation of each *Jane Eyre* adaptation may give insight to changing expectations associated with film and literature, this paper will not do so for long. It will also deviate from adaptation theory, which often focuses on inconsistences between an original and its adaptations. Instead, I will go back to the original text to identify ways in which the novel anticipates the visual art of cinema. In doing so, I strive to understand, just a bit clearer, the way in which language, imagery, and the actual senses of sight and sound are connected in a way that reflects our natural mode of communication and the organic way that we develop an understanding of ourselves in relation to the people and things around us.

I am not the first to point out the visual keenness of 19th century writers. Many scholars have pointed out the way in which Victorian authors seemed to be purposely preparing society for the cinema: what would be art’s next adventure into new forms of perceptual expression. It was in 1942 that Sergei Eisenstein remarked:

I have always derived comfort from repeatedly telling myself that our cinema is not entirely without an ancestry and pedigree, a past and traditions, or a rich cultural heritage from earlier epochs. Only very thoughtless or arrogant people could construct laws and aesthetic for cinema based on the dubious assumptions that this art came out of thin air! (371)

And while Eisenstein may have focused his attention on Charles Dickens, I wish to point out the incredibly proto-cinematic ways of Charlotte Brontë, particularly in her novel, *Jane Eyre*. Besides proving that Brontë is under acknowledged for her visual capabilities, this paper will delve deeper into her imagery to identify the formerly misinterpreted understanding of women as not just bearers, but creators of image. But to do so effectively, I will begin by situating my argument historically.

**Historical Context**

No artwork is created in a void, nor is any author unaffected by the world around her. Charlotte Brontë’s environment is, therefore, worth acknowledging when reading *Jane Eyre* with purpose. Born in 1817, Charlotte Brontë lived through the hectic time of industrialization in Victorian England, and through many profound personal events; although she died at only 38 years old in 1854, she had outlived her mother and five of her siblings (Ewbank ix).

Charlotte’s father, Patrick Brontë, left Ireland to attend college at Cambridge, then went on to become an ordained priest of the Church of England in 1807 (Stoneman 5). Somewhere in this shift of location, he also embraced a shift in identity by changing his name from the Irish Brunty, to the French sounding Brontë (Newman 4). He then became the curate in a small, remote, industrial village in which most people were tradesmen producing woolen cloth. Patrick and his wife Maria started their family in the parish on the outskirts of Haworth, existing in their connection with the church both metaphorically and literally on the periphery of the working class (Stoneman 2). It is through this story that Patrick’s attempts at upward mobility become clear: he was Irish at a time when the Irish were second class citizens, and so his embrace of all things English shows an acceptance of the very system that oppressed him. Maria had six children at Haworth Parsonage, Charlotte being the third (Nestor 2). Yet what began as a large family shrank in size at an alarming speed. Maria died when all the children were under ten years old. Shortly after, the oldest daughters Maria and Elizabeth returned from Clergy Daughter’s School to die at the ages of eleven and ten, leaving Jane as the oldest child at nine years old (Stoneman 2).

Living in the parish, the children were encouraged to improve their minds, particularly through reading. One important aspect of the Brontë childhood is its timely position just before Queen Victoria: the period considered The Regency. Coinciding with the time, Patrick Brontë did not feel compelled to censor his daughters and their reading material, an act that would become more common in the later 19th century (Stoneman 9). All the children were deeply immersed in books from the libraries of the Keighly Mechanics Institute, the Heatons at Ponden House, and Mr. Brontë’s own library. It was in these places that they were exposed to Romantic writers like Byron, Wordsworth, and Southey, but also older English poets like Milton, Shakespeare, and Pope, as well as some Scottish poets like Thomson, Campbell, and Scott (Winnifrith xiv). They also were consumers of the more popular reads of the time, including newspapers, such magazines as *The Lady’s Magazine*, literary periodicals like *Blackwood’s Magazine*, and, of course, the Bible and *Pilgrim’s Progress* (Nestor 5).

As a twenty-one-year-old at the time that Queen Victoria was crowned, Charlotte’s position as a middle class woman held a new and important function: to distinguish her family from the lower classes by being the master of the domestic space (Newman 8). For although the Victorian Era encouraged individual improvement, the only personal achievements worth striving for were the ones that increased the family’s social standing. Middle and upper class women, for example, were expected to be accomplished in music, drawing, dancing, and modern languages (Thormahlen, 79). However, their accomplishments, especially in younger women, were considered means to the end of finding a husband or obtaining a job as a governess (Hagan, Wells 2). This was particularly true for Charlotte, who had been aware since her childhood that, much like her fictional Jane Eyre, she must not rely on finding a husband but instead secure a respectable trade. Trade for a woman of Brontë’s class did not mean joining the ranks of urban women taking factory jobs: such an occupation would drop the entire family into the lower economic class. Rather, a middle class woman who did not marry would become a teacher or governess (Nestor 3). Charlotte became a teacher herself in 1834 at the age of nineteen (Winnifrith xvi).

Hilary M. Schor called the Victorian novel, “an integral part of a system of individual discipline and social formation that took its current, powerful form in the mid-nineteenth century, and has been shaping (and mis-shaping) individual readers and the culture in which they read ever since,” (349). That is to say, the Victorian novel was more than entertainment and less than a recognized art form; it was a tool book for individuals to learn the morals and expectations of the world. This was particularly true for women, who could find heroines in fiction that exemplified mastery in the domestic sphere. As novels grew in popularity in the 1840s and 1850s, so did the rise of female authors (Ewbank 5). Although the women who wrote were considered exemplary of their gender, the public sphere in which writing existed was considered an embarrassing position for women of the time. In writing, the ambition and pride of women had to be masked in order to maintain the humble and unselfish qualities of the idealized feminine. To downplay feminine drive, the woman protagonist was often in pursuit of a religious goal in which God was the force behind her actions (Corbett 18, 19).

The Brontës were historically situated at a drastic time of change for England both economically and culturally, yet much of the children’s early lives played out in their own imaginary worlds. The writerly pursuits of the Brontës have been romantically recounted by historians almost to the point of legend: plays, poetry, stories, and worlds created by the siblings during their childhood are often explained as a response to the harsh reality of boarding schools, the death of loved ones, and the religious zealotry of their aunt from whom they longed to escape.

However, their fantasies should not be trivialized to the torments of children without a proper mother figure. Rather, their imaginations were fully artistic ones that studied not only in reading and writing, but in the visual and musical arts as well. Charlotte, undoubtedly influenced by the Romantic poets, became fixated as a young adult with living on through her poetry and prose long after her death. She considered herself endowed with an artistic genius, and this confidence and ambition led her to occasionally step outside of her place as a clergyman’s daughter to make her presence known in literary circles. When she was only a teacher at Roe Head, she went so far as to write to Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, to share her poetry and explain her own desires to be recognized (Miller 10).

We know from the literary magazines Charlotte read growing up that she was in touch with the current trends in fiction, but we can also tell by the popularity of her works in the 1840s and ‘50s. Although her poetry did not catch on, her novels, including *The Professor*, *Villlette*, *Shirley*, and particularly *Jane Eyre*, went on to become wildly popular both in England and America. And in Brontë’s literature, a conformity to the expectations of a novel for and by a woman are evident: Jane Eyre’s *bildungsroman* structure shows a tradition of individualism that 19th century England fostered amidst their colonialist and classist policies. As Marianne Thormahlen explains in her study of Brontë’s narratives: “The ends towards which storylines tend is not an adult in harmony with society, but an adult in harmony with herself as part of the Creation, indulging its spirtual and imaginative-creative aspects,” (4). *Jane Eyre* tells a story of upward mobility as it follows the unfortunate, orphaned girl, who falls in love and marries the man above her in rank and fortune, therefore justifying her self worth in relation to her new husband. This is what biographer and critic Lucasta Miller calls “the basic building blocks of a simple Cinderalla story, or Bluebeard narrative” (18). What made the piece even more popular is the simalirity between the story and Charlotte’s own story of “self improvement” from obscurity to literary legend. That being said, Charlotte’s novels also pushed the limits of feminine respectability. This would lead to feelings of guilt, especially as she continued to live under the influence of her pastor father (Armstrong 267).

It should also be remembered that many first readers of *Jane Eyre* thought the novel to be an autobiography. The book was published three times over Brontë’s life: the first and second editions as “Jane Eyre: an Autobiography/Edited by Currer Bell.” For Victorian women, autobiographies held a simliar function to the novel. The autobiography manifests in writing a Cartesian paradigm in which the individual is separate from his or her society and environment (Walker 388). As it developed in the nineteenth century, the autobiogaphy became particularly genered as women began to write their own self narratives that performed a culturally expected form of femininity dominated by the domestic space, whereas men continued to legitimize their own personal gains in an increasingly capitalist society (Corbett 15). It is not until the third version that *Jane Eyre* is published as “Jane Eyre: An Autobiography by Currer Bell,” although the fictitious nature of the piece was guessed by critics before this. It was also largely guessed that behind the name Currer Bell was a woman, though Charlotte did not claim the book as hers until after her sisters’ deaths later in life (Newman 448). Charlotte’s tepid movements in and out of literary recognition may be a combination of her desire to be idolized in the way that she idolized Lord Byron and her other Romantic favorites, and her fears that her work would be judged differently as a woman and that the novel would be compared to her personal life.

The years following *Jane Eyre*’s release would show that both of her concerns were justified, especially as her sisters began going under the pseduonyms Ellis and Acton Bell. As Miller explains, “[The] Brontës’ decision to use pseudonyms had had almost the opposite effect to that intended: instead of securing an objective hearing for their work, they had unwittingly invited a hoard of amateur detectives to speculate on their identities. The authors, not the books, increasingly became the focus of interest,” (19). During this time of speculation, critics were openly gendered in their analysis of the book, one critic claiming that it was successful if written by a man, and obsene if written by a woman (Newman 448). The whole family, because of the success of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne in the literary circle, would become a source of interest so much so that a picture of Haworth parsonage during the time that the three sisters were all alive shows the place acting as a kind of tourist attraction. Historian Nancy Armstrong describes: “The well-headed tourists are too busy looking at something. The garden of mingled tombstones and heather surrounding a place that was reputedly home to a family of poets, madmen, dying women, and their preacher-poet father was evidently something of a spectacle” (198). Although interest in the Brontës grew over Charlotte’s life, her biography written by Elizabeth Gaskell two years after her death would establish legacy and fame, enough fame to rival that of her original literary hero, Lord Byron himself (Miller 1, 9). But this fame, combined with her position as a woman in Victorian England, led to much speculation on the connection between Charlotte and Jane. Critics’ lack of perceived distance between author and subject retracted from Brontë’s credibility in the literary scene until the New Critics of the 1950s and 1960s in America, who were willing to separate the book from its author (Newman 451).

Although reexamined by the New Critics, it was the feminists of the 1970s who would raise the novel to the position of feminist classic, holding up the way that Jane learns to find herself and happiness on her own terms. Perhaps the most well known analyis of the novel is the essay “A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane’s Progress,” written by feminist theorists Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The femininst perspective was challenged by theorists like Guyatri Spivak who would not accept an explanation of Bertha Mason as only a psychological projection of Jane (as Gilbert and Gubar had suggested). Much inquiry into the novel focuses the character of Bertha, whose presence is complex enough to merit volumes dedicated only to the few chapters in which she is mentioned. Other approaches that critics have taken in reading *Jane Eyre* include the deconstructionist, marxist, cultural, and psychoanalytical models.

Besides criticism in the traditional form of review and essay, *Jane Eyre* has sparked much response by other artists. Movies and other works of literary fiction inspired by Brontë’s novel have been studied by adaptation theorists like Simone Murray, who, in her essay “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry,” briefly describes and challenges some of the approaches critics have taken to understanding adaptations since the topic became its own field of study in the 1950s (Murray 4). Although I agree with Murray’s stance that adaptation theory is hindered by critics’ prerogative to merely compare and contrast adaptations to their originals, I would like to defend the point she shoots down early in her paper: that adaptation, as the post-structuralists of the 1980s and 90s suggested, is a process of critique (7). If we can accept that there is no perfect reading or truth of a work, then an adaptation can be nothing more than someone’s interpretation; their interpretation saying more about his or her cultural conditions than it does the original work.

An analysis of culture through text is particularly interesting when comparing an original and adaptation from two different time periods. For this reason, *Jane Eyre* is a useful novel to study adaptations of because there are so many of them spanning several decades. As far as literature goes, the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhyse attempts to look at the novel from the perspective of Bertha, “the madwoman in the attic”. In the realm of filmmaking, *Jane Eyre* adaptations go as far back as the 1934 film directed by Christy Cabanne, to a Bollywood rendition by R.C. Talwar in 1952, to the most recent version, by American filmmaker Cary Fukunaga in 2011. By thinking of adaptations of *Jane Eyre* as interpretations of the original text by Brontë, it becomes possible to identify the different cultural and ideological conditions that produced different renditions of a work, and what that says about the malleability of the artwork to begin with.

Amidst all of these reactions to *Jane Eyre*, from “Plain Jane’s Progress,” to Jean Rhyse’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to the 2011 filmic adaptation directed by Fukungango, what becomes clear is the wide range of interpretations. What still lacks from these readings of the novel is the historically situated understanding of Brontë’s work as being representative of a society moving towards the cinema. Although my interpretation of the novel for the purposes of this paper is influenced by all of these different approaches I have come in contact with, I would best describe it as a low-theory speculation. I argue that *Jane Eyre*’s influence has been largely ignored in terms of its contributions to the visual arts because of illogically founded opinions on women’s incapabilities in this area. This is a point I must make in order to later prove *Jane Eyre* as not only a product of culture, but a claim made by Brontë on how her specific culture operated.

**Brontë and “The Visual”**

I am not the first to point out that Charlotte Brontë had a particularly visual imagination during a particularly visual time. Film theorist Louis Comolli claimed that the Victorian Era had “a sort of frenzy of the visual,” something that Michel Foucault also identified as a source of social formation, and countless other literary critics have pointed out as colliding with the period’s rise of the novel (Nestor 9). It can also be easily tied to the advent of photography, but as Jonathan Crary states, “[The] emergence of photography and cinema in the nineteenth century is the fulfillment of a long unfolding of technological and/or ideological development in the West, whereby the camera obscura evolves into the photographic camera” (26). This long and complex history is full of shifting ideologies that placed different senses and experiences as the bearers of knowledge. While the eighteenth century placed importance on the sense of touch, inventions like the stereoscope in the nineteenth century brought back vision as the human perception of utmost importance (62). Even writing itself became more like drawing in the way it was taught with an attention to geometric shapes, its emphasis on lines, and its attention to penmanship, creating what Gerard Curtis sees as a commonality between “textual literacy” and “visual literacy” (28 19).

This visual attention in the Victorian Era did not exclude the Brontës, despite how isolated many historians claim they were from society. Christine Alexander, a historian who has uncovered and written about much of the Brontës’ various artistic endeavors, says about the family, “For all the Brontës, a knowledge of the visual arts, the habit of reading pictures, and the practice of drawing and painting, were crucial to their development as writers” (10). Patrick. Brontë arranged for his children to attend art classes and their practice and interest in visual art is obvious in both the volume of drawings and paintings that has been historically recorded, and the visual emphasis in their writing as children (Linder 62). Christine Alexander’s historicity around Charlotte’s artistic interests cannot be over appreciated considering the claim I make in this paper about her visual acuteness leading to cinematic writing. It is with Alexander’s work, particularly as it is accompanied by Jane Sellars in their book *The Art of the Brontës* that Jane’s drawings and paintings can be referenced and understood as preliminary to the kind of literature she would produce. Charlotte’s work spans from landscapes, to portraits, to miniatures: her variety giving her the sense of space and balance that I will prove critical to her skillfulness at writing imagery.

One critic who has been paramount in identifying Charlotte’s transition from drawer and painter to imagery-driven writer is Lucasta Miller, who uses the word “voyeuristic” to describe Brontë’s early life and establish the author’s somewhat erotic imagination and daydreams, especially while she was living the bland life of a teacher at Roe School. The fantasies Charlotte would inscribe at this time often began as mere images, like that of “a heavy chested African warrior sprawled lasciviously on the sumptuous couch of a beautiful queen” (9). Cynthia A. Lynder has done similar work by explaining the painterly ways in which color is used throughout *Jane Eyre* to give each of its sections a special tonal quality, each representing both changes in nature and changes in Jane herself (64). Doubtless, her passion for drawing and painting led her to develop a visual imagination that she would go on to manifest in writing. However, I will continue to argue that Charlotte’s visual skills can be understood better in terms of motion pictures than painting, drawing, or even photography.

The film theorist Sergei Eisenstein made a similar claim about Charles Dickens to the one I am making about Charlotte Brontë. In his 1942 essay, “Dickens, Griffith, and Ourselves,” Eisenstein points out the literary techniques of *Oliver Twist*, which he claims is the basis for many of the directorial choices made by *Birth of a Nation* director, D.W. Griffith. He credits Dickens for giving Griffith the idea of parallel action, as well as creating characters and atmosphere that, “Made the reader experience the same passions, making the same appeal to the good, the sentimental; like film, they made him shutter at vice, and provided the same escape from the humdrum, prosaic and everyday into something unaccustomed, unusual and fantastic… And, illuminated by the reflection from the pages of novels to life, this ordinariness came to seem romantic” (364). In other words, Dickens’ novel was able to give the reader a sense of escapism, while also keeping the story grounded in a familiar reality, which was criteria of a good film by Eisenstien’s standards and still inform what many screenwriters strive for today. Although Eisenstein uses D.W. Griffith as the link from Dickens to early/classic Hollywood cinema, such comparisons between Brontë and a specific filmmaker would be hard and potentially impossible to prove. Causality to a specific person is not necessary; what is necessary is understanding the basic mind frame that procures visual thought and how particularly visual imagery works in a narrative to create an alternate reality in the same way cinema does.

As Eisenstein goes on to analyze Chapter XXI from *Oliver Twist*, he emphasizes the everyday aspects of life for the industrial, London poor, but simultaneously creates an atmosphere that is endearing in its familiarity. The description from *Oliver Twist* gives snippets of imagery like, “‘donkey-carts laden with vegetables; chaise-carts filled with live-stock or whole carcasses of meat; milk-women with pails,’” to create a pace that quickens from imagery-based to the auditory: “‘whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of oxen’” (365, 366). Eisenstein jumps on this as the literary example of montage that Griffith would later turn into filmmaking. Dickens’ montage is a way of creating a sense of place and time while increasing the pace and anticipation of action instead of dragging it down. As Eisenstein says, the montage conveys “a complete picture of a market better than a dozen pages of description ever could!” (366). He goes on to point out that Dickens breaks from imagery to explain motivations and thoughts of characters in the same way that inserts were used in early cinema. He also recognizes Dickens for his use of imagery to convey information, like when he repeatedly describes his character looking at the clock to convey the passing of time (368).

The characteristics that Eisenstein identifies to show the cinematic quality of *Oliver Twist* include pacing, the play of light, “With its considered succession of purely visual elements inter-spliced with auditory ones,” the equivalent of a dissolve, parallel action, his treatment of characters, and the idea of escapism (366). My analysis of the “Red Room” scene in *Jane Eyre* (which is proven a scene in its singular location and time frame) offers some similar attributes as the excerpts selected by Eisenstein about *Oliver Twist*, most notably a variety of what seem to be shot types (wide shots, medium shots, close ups) and an acute sense of pacing and “editing.” Where Charlotte exceeds Dickens’ image is in her attention to color, depth, and movement, all of which prove her visually keen enough to be considered the cinematographer of her world as well as the director.

Like Dickens’ familiar scene of everyday life in London, Jane’s experience in the Red Room is both unique and symbolic of rage and mistreatment, feelings with which readers can empathize. Chapter One ends with Mrs. Reed’s line, “‘Take her to the red-room, and lock her in there.’ Four hands were immediately laid upon me, and I was borne up stairs.” Chapter Two continues, “I resisted all the way…” and the descent into the room is described (24). Because the scene visualizes Jane’s frustrations, Brontë has loaded the chapter with verbs and adverbs that describe the friction between Jane and the authority figures through movement. About the servants throwing her into the room, she says: “They had got me by this time into the apartment indicated by Mrs. Reed, and had thrust me upon a stool” (24). When Jane screams to be let out of the room, Mrs. Reed’s arrival is described with attention to not just the costume, but the costume’s movement and interaction with space: “…Mrs. Reed came along the corridor, her cape flying wide, her gown rustling stormily” (30).

Eisenstein is particularly impressed with Dickens’ variation in shot types, but what makes Brontë’s work more unique is its sense of space through light and color, providing information about the character’s emotions through the warmth and coldness described in the imagery. In a way more accustomed to the visual arts of painting, photography, and cinema, the setting of this scene is defined by the way it is lit:

The red-room was a spare chamber, very seldom slept in; I might say never, indeed; unless when a chance influx of visitors at Gateshead Hall rendered it necessary to turn to account all the accommodation it contained: yet it was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep-red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre; shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; the walls were a soft fawn colour, with a bluh of pink in it; the wardrobe, the toilet-table, the chairs were of darkly polished old mahogany. Out piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed, spread with snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample, cushioned easy chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it; and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne. (25, 26)

In this scene, light is acknowledged for its quality, and works with color to establish the mood by which all else is subjected. The words for colors here are “red” (red room), “mahogany,” “deep-red,” “red” again to describe the carpet, “crimson,” a “soft fawn colour” for the walls, a “bluh of pink,” and white accents like the head of the bed and the footstool as the pale throne. All of this specificity in the light quality of certain objects creates a gradient, or color scheme that corresponds to Jane’s emotions. Being punished for being wild and hitting her cousin, Jane’s caretakers lock her into the red room as a symbol of the way in which passion must be locked away. Brontë goes beyond arbitrary color symbolism here; the pallet of red, in much the way that fire moves, creates an energy in the closed off space that almost drives Jane mad:

My seat, to which Bessie and the bitter Miss Abbot had left me riveted, was a low ottoman near the marble chimney-piece; the bed rose before me; to my right hand there was the high, dark wardrobe, with subdued broken reflections varying the gloss of its panels; to my left were the muffled windows…

Here we can notice the movement from the right to the left, with Jane as the axis point. It is in this “panning shot” that Brontë directs our attention by way of Jane’s point of view. We continue: “…a great looking glass between them repeated the vacant majesty of the bed and room… Returning, I had to cross before the looing-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed” (26). Through the description of setting, we follow what Jane sees in much the way that camera movements would later be used in a scopophilic way to develop the narrative.

Although placing attention to the detail of this one set in a way that Dickens avoids through montage, Brontë still paces the chapter rhythmically. Whereas Dickens uses only short sentences and fragments throughout the scene, Brontë builds first with the long descriptions of the room, and then shortens them to match Jane’s physical reaction to it. By the end of the chapter, Jane recounts:

My heart beat thick, my head grew hot, a sound filled my ears, which I deemed, the rushing of wings. Something seemed near me, I was oppressed, suffocated, endurance broke down. I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort. Steps came running along the outer passage. The key turned, Bessie and Abbot entered. (29)

In this small passage, each sentence gets shorter and more sensory based in subject. The scene ends, “I heard her sweeping away; and soon after she was gone, I suppose I had a species of fit: unconsciousness closed the scene” (30). This can be read as a fade out in much the way that the literal feeling of fainting is its own kind of “fade out.”

Description of space, light, and action gives an impression in the mind of the reader not just of the physical world in which Jane lives, but how that world is colored both literally and emotionally. Although, with all of the criticism based on *Jane Eyre* since the 1970s it is hard to think of the novel as being overlooked anymore, I would argue that it has not received enough evaluation for its proto-cinematic qualities. Once we think of the novel as both a literary and progressively visual work of art, it can be re-analyzed from this perspective in a way that says just as much about today as it does about the Victorian Era in regards to the way that individuals, particularly women, understand their place in society.

**Jane’s Spectatorial Status**

Chapter Eighteen of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* deals with drama and action in a way unique to the rest of the novel. The focus of the chapter is around Mr. Rochester, Miss Ingrim and the rest of their party playing charades. At this point in the novel, Jane knows she loves Rochester, but is sure that he intends to marry Lady Ingram. Jane suffers to see them together, and less obviously, she always feels an outcast on the periphery of the high-class party. Being a plain and uninteresting governess, the guests feel no guilt in excluding her. When Rochester tries to encourage Jane to be part of their group, Miss Ingram protests and tries to redirect the attention to herself. Upon Mr. Eshton also questioning whether Jane should be invited to play charades with them, Lady Ingram replies, “she looks too stupid for any game of the sort” (185). In this way, Jane is forced to be a spectator to the scene about to unfold. It is in her unique position, however, that she holds a power over those playing charades by observing their relationships.

Their game of charades is much different than the one most often played at informal parties today. At Thornfield, props and costumes are acquired, a stage is elevated, and people sit to watch as if at a theater. However, there is something distinctive about this performance that makes it feel less like a game, less like the theater even, and more like some sort of fantastical experience for Jane to understand her own psychology in a room where she is both surrounded by other people and, at the same time, very alone. It is in this sense that Jane’s experience is most like that of the movie theater. During this game, Brontë describes an experience for Jane that is more attuned to the relationship between spectator and screen that film theorists such as Christian Metz have identified than it is a game or play. Once we begin to think of Jane as a film spectator at this moment, it opens up the possibility of applying the theories of critics like Laura Mulvey and Mary Anne Doane to understand how the visualization of Jane’s desires and fears are used to provoke her into action.

Jane sits witness to three scenes that are acted out by Miss Ingram and Rochester. The most important rule of the game is that the players are not allowed to speak. Instead, they must rely on visual cues to imply what is going on to the audience. This results in what Jane calls a “dumb show” of pantomimes. Although the scene plays out theatrically, certain language throughout the chapter indicates a filmic experience, despite the fact that motion picture has not yet been invented. Leo Braudy’s essay in “The World in a Frame” is particularly helpful in identifying the characteristics of cinema and how it differs from other art forms.

Braudy thinks of theater as a social experience, the novel as an individual experience, and film as somewhere in between (360). Jane seems to fall somewhere in this middle area to which he refers. If we try to be in the experience with her and forget that we are reading a novel, it becomes apparent that Jane’s experience watching the charades is one in which she is surrounded by other people, while also being captivated by the action to the point that nothing in the seats is mentioned. Despite the fact that charades is often played in teams or partners, with the half watching allowed to collaborate to discuss what the scene may be, Jane describes no such action in the seats. Rather, her attention is turned entirely to what is happening on the stage. Instead of learning what is occurring through pantomime, she refers to the scene’s props, costumes, and set pieces (what film critics call the *mise-en-scène*) to infer the scene’s meaning. For example, she reads from Miss Ingram’s performance, “She too was attired in Oriental fashion: a crimson scarf tied sash-like round the waist; an embroidered handkerchief knotted about her temples; her beautifully molded arms bare, one of them up-raised in the act of supporting a pitcher, poised gracefully on her head,” that she is acting as an Israeli princess (186).

A particularly cinematic technique that Rochester uses during his skit is as Jane describes: “On the third rising only a portion of the drawing room was disclosed; the rest being concealed by a screen hinge with some sort of dark and course drapery.” She goes on to explain there was “a very dim light proceeding from the horn lantern” and that “amidst the sordid scene, sat a man with his clenched hands resting on his knees, and his eyes bent on the ground” (186). It seems that the drapes, combined with the dimmer lighting, attempt to draw the eye to Rochester immediately and to avoid making him a lone, flat image on a large stage. This attempt at cutting off the sides of the stage with the drapes almost operates as a shift in aspect ratio does in film, or at least an attempt at a “mid shot” to focus the audience on the one spot in the open room in which Rochester is performing.

Although the technical decisions by Rochester’s charades team do seem to point to a cinematic attempt, the acting and perception of the acting by Jane is also fundamental in understanding this scene as proto-cinematic. Throughout the scene, it is always clear to Jane that she is watching Rochester and Ingram. She remarks on their presence in every scene, at the first of which commenting, “Then appeared the magnificent figure of Miss Ingram… by her side walked Mr. Rochester” (185). In the second scene: “Seated on the carpet, by the side of the basin was seen Mr. Rochester… Presently advanced Miss Ingram,” and again in the third scene, “I knew Mr. Rochester, though the begrimed face… might well have disguised him” (186-187). This is more aligned with the tradition of film that began after sound, in which, as explained by Leo Braudy in his essay, characters of a piece could only be extensions of their off screen selves. He continues, “The film actor emphasizes display, while the stage actor explores disguise” (360). In this sense, the game of charades is certainly more aligned with a filmic experience than a theatrical one; Rochester and Ingram, particularly in the first scene in which they pretend to marry each other, are displaying the thoughts on everyone’s minds. Braudy states, “the great film actor is generally more important than the character he plays” (361). This is particularly true for the charades game: what holds Jane’s interest is the people displaying themselves. As soon as her favorite stars leave the screen and move to the audience, she no longer has any interest in what is happening on stage. It is also interesting to note that Braudy emphasizes a film actor’s ability to interpret “what is most successful and appealing in one’s own nature” and then heighten that (361). If accepting this to be true, Lady Ingram seems to value most her grace and physique, often acting with her whole body as in the example of her Isreali princess persona, and Rochester seems to place more value on his ability to think and analyze. The last scene, featuring just him, is described by Jane as follows: “Amidst this sordid scene, sat a man with his clenched hands resting on his knees, and his eyes bent on the ground. I knew Mr. Rochester though the begrimed face, the disordered dress… might well have disguised him” (187). In this scene he is exaggerating thinking, which he perceives to be his best skill. Through the use of first person, Jane is bringing these visuals into meaning for the readers and in this way hyperbolizes her own desires and fears.

Much spectator theory is based on the psychoanalytic model. While early cinema theorists like Christian Metz accepted cinema as an extension of the Freudian concept of identity, later theorists like Mulvey choose to use psychoanalysis as “a political weapon” (711). It is worth understanding these theories to analyze *Jane Eyre*, if only because we are attempting to open the realm of interpretation in this Victorian novel to the possibilities provided by the visual artists of the twentieth century.

Two defining features of the cinema as explained by Christian Metz are the concepts of the perceptual and the imaginary: perceptual, in the sense that it uses the visual and auditory senses to signify meaning. Although the game of charades is not supposed to use sound as part of the rules, it does add the dimensions of time and movement to the visual (694). Furthermore, film is the imaginary: a fantasy in the sense that it is “unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very outset” (696). This fantasy that feels both real and unreal can be thought of as a mirror in which all desires are projected, except none of them actually feature the spectator him or herself. Metz’s description of cinema feels fairly accurate to what Jane experiences. Her fantasy at this point of the novel is for Rochester to requite her love; something she deems impossible, and something that she must live through Miss Ingram.

Jane’s identification with Miss Ingram when watching the charade scenes is somewhat accurate to the description of female spectatorship as it is explained by Mary Anne Doane in her essay “Film and the Masquerade.” In her essay, Doane interprets from Freud’s lecture “Femininity,” that women, like hieroglyphs, cinema, and other forms of visual representation, lack the distance between themselves and their representation to be self-referential: “Too close to herself, entangled in her own enigma, she could not step back, could not achieve the necessary distance of a second look” (420). This is the same logic that is perpetuated by Metz in “Identification, Mirror.” The characteristics of perception that Metz attributes to cinema are the ones that require distance, creating space between the subject and the object (422). Doane argues that it is this logic that has kept cinematic representations of women hindered. Objectifying the woman as being only the surface of the film under which the real action of men may transpire, the woman’s function is to offer what Doane calls “spectatorial desire” in the forms of voyeurism or fetishism (421). This implies that a heterosexual fulfillment may be possible for men watching cinema, but women spectators remain an enigma. While Doane neglects to theorize her own understanding of the female spectator, it may not be necessary for Jane’s spectatorial position during the charades scenes. While some may see my opinion as skewed by Jane’s position in a work of fiction rather than reality, the reaction Jane has to Miss Ingram and Rochester’s skits can best be described as objective. Indeed, the space created by Jane’s situation on the periphery of action is necessary to her understanding of the social relationships in front of her. She maintains this visual distance that Metz sees as necessary to cinema, but does not identify with either Rochester or Miss Ingram. Because of this, she also lacks any kind of catharsis from her filmic experience.

This complication of Doane’s theory situates Jane on the outside looking in on her desires, while continually reminding herself that what she’s watching is just a façade. Interestingly, Jane stays in this position for much of the novel and it acts not so much as a substitute for action in her own life, but a better understanding of social relationships that prepares her for her eventual departure from Thornfield.

**Masquerading Femininity at Thornfield Hall**

Mary Ann Doane’s “Film and the Masquerade” not only discusses spectatorship, but also the position women play in the narrative. Because it is a visual art form, much of the storyline and theme in cinema is not made in the dialogue but in the action. The direction of a character’s look, for example, is subtle but powerful visual information that can inform the audience on what is important in a given scene. It also mimics the same subject/object relationship Doane speaks of between the audience and the screened image respectively. In this way, the looking relations between characters can be analyzed to understand the power dynamics of their relationships. The fact that Jane remains on the periphery of action in much of the novel gives her an advantage in her ability to see. Although Doane is justified to concur that the cinema is particularly well suited to understand these “scenarios of looking,” Brontë’s novel offers an attempt to do the same. It is with her Victorian emphasis on the visual that much of Brontë’s dialogue exists only as a surface under which the action shows the characters’ true meanings. As in life, such cues can make up for a lack of direct, linguistic communication. These actions are often associated with the sex of the character and the manner in which he or she is performing gender.

In the midst of her analysis into spectatorship, Doane describes the concept of femininity as a masquerade. She begins by readdressing the psychoanalytical claim that women lack the distance needed to judge semiotic systems, explaining, “This body so close, so excessive, prevents the woman from assuming a position similar to the man’s in relation to signifying systems. For she is haunted by the loss of a loss, the lack of that lack so essential for the realization of the ideals of semiotic systems,” (424). According to Doane, women compensate for this lack of distance either through transvestitism or femininity. With transvestitism, a woman identifies with a male character and in the process accepts herself as masculinized (page #). Alternatively, the mask of womanliness, a woman’s ability to produce herself as the overly feminized object, works in the same way to produce that distance while also masking her ability to do so from others (page #). The woman who performs femininity maintains the illusion in an effort to hide her true self.

*Jane Eyre* exemplifies multiple approaches to femininity and womanly expectations. Jane is abused as a child both at her first home under her aunt’s supervision and then at Lowood. In the first chapter, Jane paraphrases her aunt’s words: “She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance… she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children” (20). Her aunt begins the process of distancing Jane from others, a process that Jane will revert back to when faced with social situations later in life. This is not so much a distance between Jane and other individuals, but between Jane and groups of people who act as their own micro-societies. This will reoccur as Jane’s way of maintaining the distance that Doane theorizes is only needed because of cultural conditions. Doane explains, “The entire elaboration of femininity as a closeness, a nearness, as present-to-itself is not the definition of an essence but the delineation of a place culturally assigned to the woman” (433). By being so far on the periphery of society, Jane has the advantage of seeing and understanding masquerade from an outside perspective looking in. This has a negative effect too, of course. Without recognition from groups, Jane lacks the political voice needed to advocate for herself at times of adversity. Her position on the periphery is most clear when compared to Adele, who has been raised to perform femininity.

Adele lacks the ability to express herself because of her young age, and her partiality to French, which she often uses in public when expressing excitement too quickly to translate into English. That being said, Rochester holds the power both as her benefactor and as the one with verbal mastery; he puts Adele’s story into words for Jane. He claims her to be the daughter of Celine Varens, a French opera-dancer with whom he had an illicit romantic engagement. He paints himself as generous by explaining how, despite the facts that he found Celine to be cheating on him and disbelieves the claims that Adele is his daughter, he decided to make a place for Adele at Thornfield when her mother “ran away to Italy with a musician, or singer.” He then “took the poor thing out of the slime and mud of Paris, and transplanted it here, to grow up in the wholesome soil of an English country garden” (150). Despite the fact that Adele attempts twice to interrupt Rochester’s retelling of her origins and is told to go away, the story does offer some insight on the origins of Adele’s personality. Her mother’s career as a dancer, at the time an occupation seen as objectifying and embarrassing, has its similarities to the allure of twentieth century screen stars. What is really interesting, however, is the proof Rochester receives of her charm being only a cover for manipulation. This is portrayed in the voyeuristic scene described by Rochester in which he, unbeknownst to the couple, watches Celine romantically engaged with another man. In this way, Celine is revealed as a femme fatale, what Doane calls “an excess of femininity… necessarily regarded by men as evil incarnate” (427). Her excessive femininity, marked by the way in which she poses as pictorial spectacle, acts as a decoy under which the fully capable woman operates.

Adele grows to mimic such excessive femininity, but the implied malice behind such a mask is missing. For example, just before Rochester tells Adele’s story, he gives her a “dress of rose-coloured satin, very short, as full in the skirt as it could be gathered” (145). He then becomes annoyed with her for the way she models her dress by dancing around the room, even though he is producing her into her overly feminine state. In this way, Adele acts like an example directly out of the Freudian model of femininity in her continued decent into femme fatale as destined by her mother. Yet this Victorian moment on the brink of psychoanalysis is misinterpreted so that anatomy replaces cultural pressures. This is not surprising, considering the pseudoscience of phrenology and its immense impact on the 19th century’s understanding of personality (Nestor 19).

It is in the scene in which Rochester performs femininity in Chapter Nineteen that these concepts of phrenology and an anatomical understanding of the body as analogous to feminine and masculine formation are complicated. Though Doane claims that a man would never have to dress as a woman to achieve a higher status in society, Rochester does just that by surprising his party of guests as a gypsy. Much like the position Jane takes throughout the novel, Rochester is forced to remain on the outside of the group if he wants to have a better understanding of them each personally. This requires moving into a private room so that each party guest can take off his or her daily masks worn in society. Rochester (dressed as the gypsy) and Jane speak of such masks in different words. He examines Jane’s face, looking for any phrenological hint about her current state or future, and asks, “I wonder what thoughts are busy in your heart during all the hours you sit in yonder room with the fine people flitting before you like shapes in a magic lantern: just as little sympathetic communion passing between you and them, as if they were really mere shadows of human forms and not the actual substance” (200). His description of “shadows of human form,” insists that the humans sacrifice their substance while with others, casting only shadows. After some more conversation, Jane claims that she does focus on one guest or two, “when the gestures or looks of a pair seem telling a tale: it amuses me to watch them” (200). Here she implies that there is substance behind these figures, but that such substance is not revealed except through a gaze that “tells a story” more than their formal interactions do.

The most important aspect of Jane’s reading from the gypsy is the idea that to gaze or to look is significant in the social setting, only because meaningful linguistic communication is impossible due to cultural expectations. Rochester, in this scene and throughout the book, revolts against these societal settings while at the same time conforming to and insisting on others conforming to them, depending on the benefit it brings him personally. Jane, on the other hand, is in the intimate position to speak to her readers plainly. She obtains the necessary distance to watch others performing their gendered expectations in society, and is able to reflect and reproduce the knowledge she develops in words. In this way, Charlotte Brontë has created a protagonist who both conforms to and denies the Freudian logic that would be developed in the following century. While it is true that a kind of distance is required to analyze society as a whole, this has less to do with the sex organs and more to do with the actual act of seeing. Remember that Rochester has to produce a distance between himself and his party by becoming a *woman*. If anything, psychoanalysis of *Jane Eyre* and the theorized position of the female spectator should focus less on sex, and more on the historical positions that culturally produce the self who goes on to receive or be denied societal privilege. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, the marginalized individual has a better understanding of herself from her position outside of society’s expectations of masquerade than any character included in that culture who tries to tell her who she is and what she should do (most notably, Aunt Reed, Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John Rivers).

**Conclusion**

This paper began with the hopes of offering an alternative reading of a work that has been interpreted a variety of ways. And while I did find some remarkably proto-cinematic language throughout the novel, I also began to see a misunderstanding of the piece that goes beyond just one critic’s interpretation of it. What I began to notice in my re-reading of high-theory film critics is a skewed narrative of human development based on mis-readings of Victorian works like *Jane Eyre* by founders of psychoanalysis. The mass attempt to conform to psychological theories that are not backed by any study or recorded population by early film theorists has created a tradition in cinema-based academia that produces few answers in terms of understanding femininity. What Mulvey called a “political weapon” has proven over the past five decades not “the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form,” but, rather, how psychoanalytic criticism structures expectations of women, as shown by claims like that of Lucy Irigaray paraphrased by Mary Ann Doane: “Irigaray goes even further: the woman always has a problematic relation to the visible, to form, to structures of seeing. She is much more comfortable with, closer to, the sense of touch” (425). I hope that this kind of claim, built on the logic that the anatomy of sex organs is analogous with the way women express themselves artistically, has been proven unfounded by women like Charlotte Brontë, whose visual capabilities were thwarted not by her sex organs, but the limitations of her period’s resources (the minimal circulation of photography and motion picture) and the limitations of her place assigned in the English class and sex hierarchy. What becomes necessary is a recovering of the original pieces that led to our current cinematic state, in an attempt to unearth what the theorists of the twentieth century got wrong. I hope that I have proven Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* to be such a valuable source.

While *Jane Eyre* often denies its feminist beginnings by regressing back into Victorian ideals, it does something different for twenty-first-century readers who lack a fair amount of female role models for cinema in the form of directors, gaffers, camera operators, and cinematographers. It portrays the story of a woman who constructs her own reality in pictures created by words. In doing so, it anticipates the problems feminist film theory would unravel in the later twentieth century, but it does not conform to those troublesome theories made to address such problems.

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