ADAPTIVE CRITICISM: A FEMINIST STUDY OF POSTMODERN ADAPTATION

by

MIRANDA MANEY YAGGI

(Under the Direction of Roxanne Eberle and Anne Williams)

ABSTRACT

A recent explosion in adaptations of nineteenth-century canonical texts has sparked extreme interest in the academic community, and a great deal of controversy has since ensued regarding the role adaptations play in relation to their original source material. This unprecedented peak in critical attention surrounding adaptation has highlighted the limitations scholarship faces in defining, interpreting, and theorizing about this genre that annexes multiple academic fields. Focusing specifically on adaptations of nineteenth-century women's writing, I argue that traditional approaches to adaptation are no longer productive for grappling with the vast changes postmodernism has instigated in the genre. Identifying a new trend, which I term "adaptive criticism," I argue that recent adaptations incorporate scholarship, self-reflexive meditations upon the connection between source material and new creation, and move away from mimetic re-telling to culturally-informed re-invention.

INDEX WORDS: Adaptation, Nineteenth-Century Women Writers, Conduct Literature, Gothic, Sex and the City, Bridget Jones's Diary, The Matrix, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley

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MIRANDA MANEY YAGGI

Bachelor of Arts, Reinhardt College, 1999

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2005

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MIRANDA MANEY YAGGI

Major Professor:	Roxanne Eberle
Committee:	Anne Williams Richard Menke Linda Brooks

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2005

DEDICATION

This thesis—and whatever it may one day become—is dedicated to the brilliant women-writers who have stimulated my literary curiosity, fostered my intellectual growth, and inspired me to contribute my voice to this dynamic conversation:

Roxanne Eberle, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Anne K. Mellor,

Anne Williams, and Susan Wolfson.

I hope one day to earn a place among you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have accomplished this thesis, or endured the long process that produced it, alone. I would like, therefore, to acknowledge the community's support and collaboration. My sincerest and most heart-felt thanks go to the following people.

Roxanne Eberle, for her invigorating (and often grueling) Jane Austen seminar, which instigated the germinal paper that ultimately gave rise to this thesis. Her continued support, super-human ability to respond to my every question, email, and request for time, and her patience with the pure sprawl of this project are largely responsible for whatever quality this thesis may be said to demonstrate.

Anne Williams, for transforming what was an obsessive but untutored love of the Gothic into the most compelling and well-researched chapter of my thesis. Her wisdom and grace are unsurpassed.

Richard Menke, for his delightfully fun emails that offered both guidance and much-need perspective. Also, his 19th Century novel seminar and his continued insight were invaluable to my work, my growth, and my literary being.

Patrick Denker, for his unwillingness to concede a point without first making me work, sweat, and bleed for it. Whatever is most thoroughly argued, and perhaps over-argued, owes much to our marathon discussions. His inexhaustible support, points and counter-points, and willingness to watch and re-watch, discuss and re-discuss *The Matrix* trilogy were unbelievably generous.

Luke Smith, Taylor Carmichael, Debra Scoggins, and Julian (Jules) Guerrero, for their loving friendship and invigorating peership. Our long discussions, drinks, and dinners were fertile ground from which so much more than this thesis was reaped.

Lisa Renzi and Sonam Katru, for more than I could list or ever repay.

Sara Steger and Robin Wharton, for their professional camaraderie in Park Hall and on the 19th Century British Women Writer's conference panel—which resulted in the refinement of crucial arguments in my *Frankenstein* chapter—as well as for their support, their friendship, and their contribution to the best group of women scholars UGA has to offer.

My family: Mom, Chip, Rachel, Harold, Missi, Ron, Marsi, Larry, LeAnne and Brent, for supporting me through experiences they couldn't quite understand, for investing in my dreams and me even more than I did, for family vacations that rejuvenated my spirits, and for keeping me fed during the lean times.

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INTRODUCTION

Adaptation: Literature's Half-Sister

> "Do I think my film is better than the novel? Oh, I don't think I would say that… an adaptation has to be a transformation."
>
> --Sally Potter, *Orlando* Director[1]

The film genre of adaptation has long proved a troublesome child of debatable academic parentage. Does adaptation belong in literary studies, culture studies, or cinema studies? If adaptation belongs to multiple disciplines, can a single discipline approach the text with all of the necessary theoretical tools? Literary scholars rarely discuss cinematic techniques such as spectator identification, voyeurism, or visual pleasure in their largely *literary* readings of adaptations. Similarly, film scholars tend to ignore how a single adapted text stands in relation to the original author's larger oeuvre. A power struggle over textual priority seems to dominate adaptation discourse with literary scholars quick to privilege the novel over the film, and film scholars primarily dismissing the original text in favor of viewing the film as a distinct subject. While the academic anxieties surrounding adaptation are certainly prevalent and perhaps valid, the genre has undergone significant fundamental changes since its early Hollywood beginnings in the 1930s and 1940s, and this shift in the genre necessitates, or should at any rate, a shift in its treatment within the academic community.

The genre has grown up, so to speak, and its evolution is intimately tied to the larger postmodern movement that spans all of the academic disciplines in the humanities. Since film is an artistic medium specifically tailored to and targeting social tastes, it necessarily tracks cultural shifts; it therefore stands to reason that adaptation, as the interactive space between film and

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[1] Walter Donahue, " Immortal longing: Sally Potter Interview." *Sight and Sound*. March 1993, 10-13.

literature, reflects the postmodern mood and achievements that have taken shape in these fields and in the larger community. Thus, while the scholarship surrounding adaptation has always been characterized by ambivalence and has continually been in flux, traditional modes, if we can call them that, of examining adaptation no longer provide effective means for discussing this evolving genre and its cultural import or impact. With the exception of Shakespearian adaptations, nowhere is this issue more apparent than in the field of nineteenth-century novel studies. Broadly speaking, this thesis will track the changes taking place within the genre of adaptation by looking specifically at recent adaptations of nineteenth-century women's writing. Further, I will attempt to situate what I believe is a new trend in adaptation in a transitional and postmodern space between the historic period of the British nineteenth-century past and the cultural Hollywood present within which current adaptations are produced.

While "postmodern" is a tricky conceptual category that evokes much ambiguity and heated scholarly debate, we can begin to discuss the current state of adaptation by discussing "postmodern" in its broadest and most commonly accepted terms.[2] Beginning from this central context before I extend the definitional boundaries outward, I think it uncontroversial to first assert that postmodern adaptations exhibit a self-reflexive attitude—a palpable sense of awareness within the film itself regarding its source material and its own re-inventive role. It is safe to say then, given this first characteristic of postmodernism, that current adaptations are aware of themselves as a textual space of interpretation and repetition situated between the novel and the screen. This self-awareness is manifest in innumerable aspects of recent adaptations,

[2] My use of "postmodernism" is indebted to Jean Francois Lyotard's germinal book *The Postmodern Condition* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Having acknowledged my debt, however, I would like to evoke "postmodernism" as it has become practically applied within the humanities, as a cultural climate rather than a definitive theory. To this end, I place emphasis on the common characteristics of postmodernism rather than a particular theory or definition of postmodernism.

which I will discuss at length later, but Emma Thompson's published diary of her work with Ang Lee on the 1995 adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* can offer one example, Thompson notes,

> I ask Laurie if it's possible to get trained fish. Lindsay says this is how we know I've never produced a movie. She tells us that two of her friends had read the script and thought I'd invented the pregnancy of Brandon's family ward for shock value. It's surprising to find such events in Austen, but after all, how many people know that there's a duel in *Sense and Sensibility*? When Lindsay asked me to adapt the novel I thought that *Emma* or *Persuasion* would have been better. In fact there's more action in *S&S* than I'd remembered and its elements translate to drama effectively.[3]

Thompson's emphasis on what can and does translate well to screen is certainly not a new concern within Hollywood. Her expressed interest, however, in how film can encourage audiences (even screenwriters and producers) to re-evaluate what is essentially off-screen in a text is a relatively new trend. The fact that Thompson wrote both a screenplay for a movie and then published a textual account of her adaptation points to the keen awareness she had of her transitional position between the text and the screen. Rather than merely capitalizing on the way a book can provide a profitable screenplay, these new adaptations demonstrate a self-awareness of existing in a liminal space between text and film with an influence that works bi-directionally, from the book to the screen and back again.

Another aspect of the postmodern condition that has influenced the adaptation genre are the ways in which traditional boundaries are challenged, blurred, and conflated. Postmodernism is marked by its disregard for arbitrary distinctions between high and low culture, between historical retrospect and current ideology, and between repetition and re-invention. Suzanne R.

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[3] Emma Thompson, *The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay & Diaries: Bringing Jane Austen's Novel to Film.* New York: Newmarket Press, 1995. 209

Pucci and James Thomson highlight the merging of once seemingly disparate audience demographics in the introduction to their book *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture* as they note: "With the figure of Austen at the center of this proliferation of media, it becomes increasingly difficult and misleading to make sharp or convincing distinctions between high and low, elite and mass culture; between literature and popular entertainment."[4] They further contend,

> Even though the world that Austen's novels represent is ostensibly located in the time, space, and conventions of early-nineteenth-century England, the story of Austen's recently exploding popularity across a proliferating variety of media and technologies (film, Internet, tourism, television) is an event, or rather a constellation of events—in other words, a phenomenon that has crystallized at a particular moment in our own contemporary culture.[5]

In effect, Pucci and Thompson insist that current Austen adaptations appeal to a broad audience base that cannot productively be reduced to any standard criteria and that this appeal is based on a nostalgia for the past that has more to do with current trends and cultural anxieties than historic or literary reference.

While I agree with Pucci and Thompson's contention that our current social anxieties and ideologies are mapped onto historic nostalgia, I would not go so far as to insinuate that the current Austen adaptations speak more to a present state of affairs than a reflection upon Austen or a past literary heritage. Instead, I think these adaptations often deal with two moments of time simultaneously and thus map an interesting trajectory from nineteenth-century issues to their

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[4] Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson, ". "The Jane Austen Phenomenon: Remaking the Past at the Millennium." In *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson, 1-10. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003. 5

[5] Pucci and Thompson, "Jane Austen Phenomenon," 1.

more current twentieth- and twenty-first- century manifestations. Because postmodern adaptations are self-conscious of themselves as adaptations and aware of the temporal boundaries they cross (location, social class, time, etc.), they are located in an indeterminate and quixotic zone that allows and encourages textual innovations outside traditional definitions and boundaries. They use this space to more self-consciously weave together artistic creative license, cultural subjectivity, and academic scholarship.

Provocative adaptations capitalize on this free zone existing outside traditional academic boundaries in many ways and on a number of levels. This is not to say, however, that all adaptations equally demonstrate a serious postmodern approach nor deliver valuable material for academic study. Allowing for the fact that culturally shallow approaches to adaptation will continue to exist as long as production studios view novels as convenient and lucrative script material, a strong case can nevertheless be made for a forward momentum in the genre that strives toward creating thought-provoking and academically influenced artistic expressions. Adaptations, at least the more self-reflexive sort, no longer seek merely to play out, or to play upon, a previous text. Bringing the plot of a novel to the screen is now only one aspect, and perhaps the least important one, an adaptation addresses. The façade of enacting a "period-piece" for its own sake has been abandoned as adaptations are more fully embracing the realization that they cannot escape their own historical moment. Thus, screenwriters and directors are able to both represent a historical period and simultaneously use that historical period as a vehicle for reflecting current ideology and scholarship. As a result of collapsing temporal boundaries, adaptations can engage in a new kind of academic conversation with both the classic text and the modern reader.

Cultural subjectivity, one of the aspects that I argue is central to this shift in adaptation, has become one of the key issues under attack by scholars who privilege text over film, or original material over adaptation. Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson are not the only scholars to argue that historically set adaptations sacrifice an authenticity to the past in favor of reflecting current culture. Rebecca Nixon argues in "Misrepresenting Jane Austen's Ladies" that current directors and screenwriters are doing Jane Austen a disservice by re-writing her leading ladies in order to represent current feminist thinking at the sacrifice of "muted protofeminist themes," and that this re-writing is driven by consumer demands.[6] Essentially, films carried by subtle female characters do not translate into box-office dollars; thus they must be appropriately updated or sensationalized. In Dickson's opinion, Nick Dear and Emma Thompson unduly exaggerated the female characters in *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*, and in so doing, "they have undermined the quiet feminist force of both works."[7] As Dickson points out, the kind of aggressive female conduct represented in these adaptations not only revises "Austen's texts but key aspects of what we know of women's history."[8] Deborah Kaplan similarly suggests that Austen adaptations have been "harlequinized" into mass-market romances in order to create a form of escapist entertainment for modern women facing an increasingly unstable system of romantic relationships.[9] Devoney Looser also argues for the projection of current cultural concerns onto Austen adaptations in "Feminist Implications of the Silver Screen Austen." According to her reading, "Austen's reemergence demonstrates progressive, feminist elements at

[6] Rebecca Dickson, "Misrepresenting Jane Austen's Ladies: Revising Texts (and History) to Sell Films." In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 44-57. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998.

[7] Dickson, "Austen's Ladies," 45.

[8] Dickson, "Austen's Ladies," 50.

[9] Deborah Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen." In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 177-187. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998.

work in popular culture" and "the adaptations contribute to a 'mainstreaming' of feminism."[10] Essentially, each of these critics and many more accuse, to varying degrees, current adaptations of manipulating Austen's texts in order to both attract and represent current audiences and their social situations at the expense of accurately representing Austen's original texts.

While I agree that adaptations inevitably reflect current attitudes toward gender and romance, this argument, I believe, ignores an important connection between past text and present representation. In examining adaptations, we need not necessarily choose between historical accuracy and current applicability. Because they invoke the past into a current medium, adaptations demand a more nuanced approach. The fact that classic texts can be made to reflect current entertainment values and social issues suggests that the original text and the adapted text share important common concerns and that an examination of the correlations between the two may warrant academic investigation rather than censure. As I will argue in the following chapters, many of the adaptations surrounding nineteenth-century women's writing echo unsettling social patterns. Adapting classic texts to explore current women's ideas, issues, and desires, says something important not only about the present, but also about the past and the span of time that connects the two moments.

While juxtaposing separate historical periods—and thus complicating a text's historical position or cultural subjectivity— is one important aspect of the postmodern change in adaptation, the ways in which academic scholarship and creative license now play more dominant roles in adaptations are equally important issues for examination. Some of the most innovative adaptations not only embrace full creative license, but they also *embody* and *counter* the academic scholarship surrounding the text they adapt. Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* is

[10] Devoney Looser, "Feminist Implications of the Silver Screen Austen." In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 159-176. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998. 159

one example. Rozema's sexy and steamy 1999 adaptation of *Mansfield Park* marks an entirely new phenomenon in comparison to Robert Leonard's 1940 rendition of *Pride and Prejudice*. Leonard's film, with its tagline "when pretty girls tease men into marriage," was marketed as a light-hearted romance, and its focus on flirting and grand costuming (which was notably historically inaccurate) would seem to suggest that the particular plot which drives the film could have been interchangeable. As Sue Parrill contends in *Jane Austen on Film and Television,* MGM screenwriter Jane Murfin, who "was experienced in working in the genre of romantic and screwball comedy," was primarily drawn to *Pride and Prejudice* because the novel "lends itself to the broadly comic treatment" of that genre. Given MGM's rather shallow marketing interests, scriptwriter Aldous Huxley "apparently struggled to maintain the essence of the novel while having to compress the story and defend against efforts to sensationalize it."[11] Despite Huxley's frustrated script ambitions, MGM ultimately produced a film that capitalized on Austen's usefulness within the screwball genre rather than a film that was sincerely concerned with examining or representing Austen's text.

Like so many classic Hollywood adaptations, Austen's text was primarily an inexpensive script convenience for MGM's lucrative repertoire. Once we get to Rozema's *Mansfield Park* in 1999, we encounter a far more self-aware film with a director who is obviously well read in Austen scholarship and feminist criticism. Stemming from an exchange between Fanny Price and Sir Thomas in *Mansfield Park* that perhaps subtly suggests Austen's criticism of colonization, Rozema then creates a *Mansfield Park* steeped in feminist and post-colonial discourse, which further departs drastically from the novel in terms of events, characterization, and dialogue. Rozema sacrifices strict fidelity to Austen's text in order to remain faithful to the issues she

[11] Sue Parrill, *Jane Austen on Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Adaptations.* London: McFarland & Co, Inc., 2002, 50.

regards as central to the novel. The result is a *visual* academic discourse that works in collaboration with previous scholarship and delivers a love story that speaks as much to current expectations and issues as it does to Rozema's reading of Austen's historically situated courtship satire.

Speaking to this controversial issue of fidelity, Sally Potter contends that in her adaptation of *Orlando*, "[it] would have been a disservice to Virginia Woolf to remain slavish to the letter of the book, for just as she was always a writer who engaged with writing and the form of the novel, similarly the film needed to engage with the energy of cinema."[12] Potter addresses a key element of this debate: a change in medium necessarily facilitates a change in approach. While the novel as a form offers writers certain possibilities that film does not (such as free indirect discourse), film also offers artists techniques unavailable to novelists. Recognizing that one medium cannot translate directly to another, directors must modify or transform the approach a story takes in order to remain faithful in a larger sense to the original material. Thus, Rozema, Potter, and many other directors and screenwriters sacrifice more traditional and literal treatments of the text in favor of a medium through which to offer critiques of culture, literature, and cinema. What follows from embracing this more creative technique is an artistic product that stands in relation to the original source but is not subsumed by that source. Roger Gard attacks the philandering nature of adaptations by quipping, "isn't it unfortunately the case that none of them (adaptations) remains in the mind as even a minor work of art?"[13] By incorporating the liberating values afforded by postmodernism, adaptations like *Mansfield Park* and *Orlando*, it seems to me, do "remain in the mind" and offer themselves more fully as unique pieces of art

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[12] Sally Potter, "Notes on the Adaptation of the book *Orlando*." *University of Alabama in Hunstville: Virgina Woolf Seminar.* http://www.uah.edu/woolf/Orlando_Potter.htm (9 November 2003).

[13] Roger Gard, "A Few Skeptical Thoughts on Jane Austen and Film." In *Jane Austen on Screen*, edited by Gina Macdonald and Andrew F. Macdonald, 10-12. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 12

and scholarship. In fact, adaptations that depart so dramatically from the original text forge a new category of their own since "adaptation" as a genre term has traditionally been coded in such a way that privileges text over film, or original over creative reinvention.

Adaptive Criticism seems a more accurate term to apply to the postmodern adaptations, including modern novels and films, which embody academic scholarship and stand at the intersection of multiple time periods, disciplines, and artistic expressions. As I will argue in the following chapters, adaptive criticism refers to a specific, though materially vast and often complex, subset of texts within the larger genre of adaptation. This term denotes adaptive work that is postmodern in approach and critical in nature; these works capitalize upon pop culture and mass media techniques in order to investigate ideological issues resonant throughout past and present fiction. Furthermore, I will argue that postmodernism's transgression of traditional academic boundaries has created a rich environment of inter-textuality and opened up seemingly endless possibilities for the fundamental concept of adaptation. By reading texts such as *Sex and the City* and *The Matrix* in connection with nineteenth-century novels, I will suggest that these films, which are not readily identified as adaptations, exhibit unorthodox adaptive techniques and proffer compelling readings of canonical texts. In order to clearly demonstrate the expansion in the definition of "adaptive" that my thesis proposes, as well as the academic imperative for such an expansion, I will begin first with adaptation in its strictest sense and gradually push the boundary to its furthest productive extent. Opening with adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, I will explore the relationship between the BBC's conventional *Pride and Prejudice* and the *Bridget Jones* texts created by Helen Fielding and Sharon Maguire. From this relatively conservative appropriation of adaptation, given that each text directly references its relationship with Austen's novel, I will then extend the adaptive argument to discuss the less obvious

relationship between HBO's *Sex and the City* and its adaptation of nineteenth-century women's conduct books. Taking the argument to its furthest functional limits, I will conclude by positioning the Wachowksi brothers' *Matrix* trilogy as an adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Adaptive criticism has taken on many forms in recent years, and, exemplifying the postmodern condition with which it is intimately tied, has been the only form of scholarship able to seamlessly annex both "high" and "low" cultural audiences without respect to traditional boundaries. While there are few people outside of the academy discussing Claudia Johnson's scholarship on Austen, there are few people left within the academy who are not talking about Emma Thompson or Andrew Davies in relation to Austen studies. Furthermore, when viewers discuss Rozema's film, they are unknowingly working with Johnson's scholarship that inspired Rozema's interpretation. Because of these unprecedented changes in viewer demographics, the wide-ranging influence of academic scholarship upon pop culture, and the shift from mimetic to creative reinvention, I seek in this thesis to suggest that traditional adaptation theories are no longer effective for analyzing this new category of text that I have termed adaptive criticism. To that end, my readings are intended to open up new directions within adaptation discourse.

CHAPTER ONE

From Elizabeth Bennet to Bridget Jones: Restructuring Adaptive Approaches to Austen

"So, too, cinematic directors of Jane Austen must translate her prose into their own language, answering her in an idiom that is equivalent rather than closely corresponding. Demands for fidelity are therefore inappropriate because the shift from one language to another, from a verbal sign-system to a visual one, inevitably creates difference."

--Jocelyn Harris[1]

In an extraordinary display of inter-textual and interpersonal relationships, Helen Fielding, Sharon Maguire and Andrew Davies contributed to the Austen adaptation explosion of the 1990s with their separate but collaborative adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. First, Andrew Davies and Sue Birtwistle re-ignited a pop-culture and consumer passion for Austen across Great Britain and the United States in 1995 with their adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle. This BBC miniseries garnered tremendous viewer-ratings when it first aired in Britain, and it continues to remain an international top selling film for A&E.[2] Following on the heels of this adaptive success, Helen Fielding incorporated many of Davies's script ideas, images and inventions in her own novelistic adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* entitled *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Then in 2001, Fielding's long-time friend, Sharon Maguire, directed Miramax's

[1] Jocelyn Harris, "'Such a transformation!': translation, imitation, and intertextuality in Jane Austen on Screen." In *Jane Austen on Screen*, edited by Gina Macdonald and Andrew F. Macdonald, 44-68. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 44.

[2] James Thompson, in his article "How to do Things with Austen," notes that "between 9 and 10 million British viewers watched the last episode of *Pride and Prejudice* (out of 47 million, which is an implausible 21 percent) and the "three part series earned A&E its highest rating ever when it aired here in January." During the broadcast of this adaptation, sales of *Pride and Prejudice* hit 35,000 copies a week according to the *New York Times*" (*Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, State U of NY Press: 2003, 14).

film production of Bridget Jones's Diary[3] after collaborating on the screenplay with both Fielding and Davies.

Though each of these texts overtly refers to Austen and explicitly adapts her work, only the BBC's production has been given serious academic attention thus far. In addition, no work has been done to date discussing the inter-textual relationship existing between these three adaptations or what that relationship brings to Austen studies. Even in the most recent Austen media scholarship, such as *Jane Austen in Hollywood* (1998), *Jane Austen on Film and Television* (2002), *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture* (2003), and *Jane Austen on Screen* (2003), no mention is made of either Fielding or Maguire, yet Birtwistle's and Davies' BBC adaptation is treated critically in these and other academic texts. Fielding and Maguire's adaptations are only now beginning to be discussed at professional conferences, and Imelda Whelehan has recently identified Bridget Jones as a negative cultural icon in her book *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*; aside from Whelehan, however, scholarship concerning *Bridget Jones* is still comparatively rare, and examining this disparity highlights some of the limitations that I currently see in academic work regarding adaptation.

Perhaps the most obvious source of resistance that this division between the adaptations raises is that of textual fidelity. Building on Erica Sheen's argument that the academy "provides the institutional mechanisms and procedures" that "structure the changing frames of reference for critical perceptions of textual integrity," I argue that the academy's role in shaping the parameters of discussion around

[3] I have chosen to depart slightly from the *Chicago Manual of Style* in order to clearly differentiate between Fielding's and Maguire's adaptations: Fielding's novel will appear as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (italicized) and Maguire's film will appear as Bridget Jones's Diary (underlined) throughout this chapter. When referring to the larger Bridget Jones phenomenon, which encompasses both adaptations, it will appear as *Bridget Jones* (italicized).

canonical material has imposed ineffective constraints upon the adaptation studies discourse.[4] Sheen suggests that the academy fulfills a supervisory role in relation to classic texts by framing the context for discussion and defining what constitutes textual integrity. In a sense, the academy "protects" the canon by defining and controlling the theoretical tools available for examining these texts and tends to censure divergent approaches deemed thematically disloyal. An adaptation's faithfulness to the original text is a predominant theme throughout current Austen scholarship where "fidelity" becomes inextricably linked with textual "integrity."

The problem with conflating fidelity and integrity is that it assumes a universal standard, a "right reading" versus a "wrong reading." As Joceyln Harris points out, fidelity in a literal sense (which the academic censure implies) is impossible and thus ineffective when discussing the translation from book to film:

> What all this means is that the relationship of the Jane Austen version to Jane Austen's texts can never be purely mimetic. "Faithful translations" of her works cannot exist, for as soon as they are carried into that other medium of film, their difference means that they displace their originals in a kind of metamorphic or even metonymic maneuver. Far better to make the alteration deliberate and wholesale, that is, to create an imitation.[5]

Harris resituates the issue of fidelity by distinguishing between "translation" and "imitation." Translation, in Harris's use of the term, is not only complicated by a change in medium but also by the slippery issue of defining authorial intent. Harris draws out this issue by asking, "In any case, when we speak of fidelity

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[4] Erica Sheen. Introduction, *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen*, edited by Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000.

[5] Jocelyn Harris, "'Such a transformation!': Translation, Imitation, and Intertextuality in Jane Austen on Screen." In *Jane Austen on Screen*, 44-68. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

to Jane Austen, whose Jane Austen are we talking about? Jane Austen's Jane Austen, or the individual reader's? We cannot know her mind. To guess at an author's original "meanings" is to be labeled a liberal humanist, a cultural hegemonist, and to fall beyond the pale."[6] Instead, Harris suggests that imitation, a dominant theme in eighteenth-century literature and one which *Bridget Jones* displays, is a more productive way to discuss these texts because, unlike translation, imitation "stresses its difference from the original in order to showcase the inventiveness of the author" and "invites the reader to hold both the old text and the new text simultaneously in mind."[7]

Harris's argument marks an important divergence from the predominant academic attitude toward adaptation. A glance through the major publications concerning Austen adaptations demonstrates the value scholars place on strict fidelity over inventiveness and difference. For instance, Devoney Looser argues in "Feminist Implications of the Silver Screen Austen" that Austen's heroes have been rewritten or "reinvented" as "new men" in order to accommodate current feminist thinking.[8] Deborah Kaplan's "Mass Marketing Jane Austen" echoes Looser's argument in more critical terms by insisting that Austen's texts become unduly romanticized in Hollywood productions. Insisting that Austen's courtship plots were intentionally shallow vehicles for stories concerned with other female-centric issues, Kaplan argues that these "harlequinized" productions do a disservice to Austen's novels.[9] Echoing another "disservice," Jan Fergus criticizes Rozema's postmodern approach to *Mansfield Park* for being "pastiche" and sensationalized, and asserts that such postmodern creativity becomes reductive

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[6] Harris, "Translation, Imitation, and Intertextuality," 45.

[7] Harris, "Translation, Imitation, and Intertextuality," 51,53.

[8] Devoney Looser, "Feminist Implications of the Silver Screen Austen." In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 159-176. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998.

[9] Deborah Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women and Courtship in Two Film Adaptations." In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 177-187. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998.

and misses the point of Austen's novel.[10] By demonstrating how these adaptations fail, do a disservice, or miss the point, Looser, Kaplan, Fergus, and other scholars approach their compelling readings of Austen's texts from the central basis of textual and thematic fidelity. They seem to regard the inventive difference that Harris notes as a detriment rather than a provocative contribution to the field. Using such strictly mimetic standards for evaluating adaptations unduly excludes complex and unorthodox adaptations such as *Bridget Jones* in favor of more dutiful adaptations such as Sue Birtwistle's and Andrew Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Despite being chided for its overtly sexual appeal to a female audience, Sue Birtwistle's and Andrew Davies' adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* has been embraced by academics primarily because it uses the same name as the original novel and demonstrates an amazing fidelity to the original dialogue and plot. The academic community has not equally embraced Fielding's and Maguire's works; instead, reviewers immediately branded them with the disparaging labels of "chick lit" and "chick flick" upon the debuts of each of their works.[11] Fielding's book was an instant pop-culture success when it hit the shelves in 1996, and it was listed in the "romance" section of book reviews as a "runaway success."[12] In fact, the book has become a cultural icon, and "'Bridget Jones-isms'—such as 'singleton' and 'smug married'— have seeped into the vernacular."[13] Despite its pop-culture success, or perhaps because of its pop-culture success, many scholars dismiss *Bridget Jones's Diary*, while reviewers

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[10]Jan Fergus, "Two *Mansfield Parks*: purist and postmodern." In *Jane Austen on Screen*, edited by Gina Macdonald and Andrew F. Macdonald, 69-89. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

[11] In this argument I draw on a numb er of comments by book and movie reviewers because these professionals were the first, and for a few years the only, professionals discussing *Bridget Jones* in print. Their opinions and reviews helped shape the resulting feminist controversy that scholars, like Imelda Whelehan, later joined in examining. Though these reviews are not "scholarly" resources, they do provide an important background in viewer response as well as continue the theme that this thesis addresses, which is the equal cultural access of literary materials that has, unfortunately, been meet by much academic resistance.

[12] Kristin Ramsdell, "Urban, Single, and in Love." *New York Magazine*. 21.20. 16 January 1998: 78.

[13] Nina Biddle and Anne-Marie O'Neill, "Singular Woman." *People Magazine*. 49.24 22 June 1998: 199.

called it a "chick-lit offering," "shamelessly simple," and concluded that it only "flirts with a plot of sorts."[14] One reviewer, while hailing the book's brilliant realism and appeal, negated any real intellectual interest by claiming that "it would be a shame to spend too much time searching for meaning in a book that's this much fun to zip through."[15] Similarly, the movie adaptation fared little better. Though it was a box office hit due to tremendous promotion, an existing fan base established by the book, and A-list stars, it was generally considered "less substantial than the book—if that's possible."[16] Although many scholars ignore it and critics pan it, *Bridget Jones*, it seems to me, offers interesting contributions to Austen discourse that a traditional adaptation, such as the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*, typically restricts.

Because Fielding and Maguire situate Austen's plot in a modern setting, they are each able to openly embrace and exploit their "inventive difference," as Harris terms it, from the original text in interesting ways. *Bridget Jones* invites the audience to hold both texts in mind simultaneously and to explore the conversation that develops between the two. Avoiding a mimetic approach to Austen's novel, Fielding and Maguire gain a certain advantage over artists like Andrew Davies, Patricia Rozema, and Emma Thompson since *Bridget Jones* eludes criticisms like those that Cheryl L. Nixon and Rebecca Dickson lodge against period-piece adaptations for unduly reshaping Austen's Regency characters so as to appeal to modern tastes. Moving Austen's plot out its particular historical moment with all of its attendant costume and dialogue restrictions allows Fielding and Maguire to make Austen's text more apparently applicable to the modern audience. In this way, both *Bridget Jones* adaptations

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[14] Ramsdell, "Urban Single, and in Love," 78.
Anthony Lane, "The Devil and Miss Jones." *The New Yorker*. 77.8 April 16, 2001: 90.
Elizabeth Gleick, "A V. Fine Mess," *New York Times*. 147.51071 Feb 17, 1998: E2.

[15] Gleick, "A V. Fine Mess," E2.

[16] Peter Rainer, "A Bridget too Far," *New York Magazine*. 34.16 April 23, 2001: 138.

trace an interesting trajectory between modern courtship issues and their nineteenth-century counterparts, for even as these adaptations stress their artistic differences they also stress their similarities to Austen's text. The similarly complex and controversial feminist issues with which all three texts are engaged are made all the more powerful precisely because *Bridget Jones* differentiates itself from *Pride and Prejudice*. Changes in clothing, courtship, and culture across two centuries make the lack of fundamental change in feminine concerns all the more obvious.

Echoing the female-centric concerns they hold in common with Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the most important aspects of Fielding and Maguire's work is the maelstrom of feminist controversy that *Bridget Jones* has recently incited. Innumerable movie and book critics echo Peter Rainer's sentiment that "Bridget pays lip service to sisterhood but mostly she's a mess of triumphantly unevolved longings and peccadilloes. She's a new-old type: the post-feminist, pre-feminist."[17] As one reviewer more kindly explains it, Bridget "captures neatly the way modern women teeter between 'I am woman' independence and a pathetic girlie desire to be all things to all men."[18] Bridget takes her career into her own hands, reads feminist literature, labels men with social "entitlement" fantasies as "fuckwits," and defends the idea that single women should be spared humiliating "tick-tock" biological-clock references. While upholding these modern feminist values, Bridget also physically tortures herself with hot wax to prepare for dates, happily partakes in her own sexual harassment via inappropriate emails from her boss, and obsessively dials 1471 to see if she has missed any important calls from would-be suitors. Fielding sardonically deconstructs this curse of the feminine contradiction as Bridget records:

[17] Rainer, "A Bridget too Far," 138.
[18] Gleick, "A V. Fine Mess," E2.

> As the girls fluttered around finding their handbags and grinning stupidly at Daniel, I started eating all the nut, praline, fudge or caramel-based chocolates out of my box of Milk Tray, feeling a bewildering mixture of smugness and pride over my perfect new boyfriend whom the girls clearly wished to have a go at shagging, and furious with the normally disgusting sexist drunk for ruining our feminist ranting by freakishly pretending to be the perfect man. Huh. We'll see how long this lasts, won't we? I thought, while I waited for him to come back.[19]

Many of Bridget's observations challenge a clear feminist reading of the adaptations. Bridget implies that feminist rants are inspired by bad male behavior and are thus no longer necessary when boyfriends become "perfect men." In a sense, then, feminism exists as a reaction to men rather than a social movement concerned primarily with women. Further, her romantic cynicism is undercut by her willingness to wait on Daniel's romantic lead. Just as she waits for him to come back, she also waits by the phone for his calls, waits by the computer for his emails, and ultimately allows him to take the lead in shaping the momentum of their relationship.

Entertainment critics are not alone in condemning Bridget Jones for her fair-weather feminism; scholar Imelda Whelehan takes a serious look at Bridget's impact on and reflection of pop-culture's relationship with feminism. Whelehan argues that the "Bridget Jones effect," which encompasses the "singleton" images offered by media representations such as *Sex and the City, Alley McBeal,* and women's glossy magazines, paints "a bleak picture of the contemporary singles scene" and articulates the anxiety that "feminism is popularly perceived as incompatible with heterosexuality because of the

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[19] Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996. 110.

tough choices it might be seen to present once one 'politicizes' one's own relationships."[20] Whelehan does acknowledge Fielding's use of irony that many critics miss as she notes, "*Bridget Jones's Diary* offers us a humorous send-up of the means by which we internalize style and trend doctrines, but it does not offer us a way out of them;" she further argues, "the novel also allows us to identify with Bridget and celebrate our failings in a rather complacent act of self-indulgence."[21]

Fielding and Maguire's equivocal representations of feminism at work in the popular mind are certainly problematic. In Maguire's film, Bridget's moment of feminist reckoning, in which she clears her bookshelf of dating guides to the tune of Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman," is undercut by a montage of dating memories and wedding fantasy flashbacks. Her empowered quest to find a new career that leaves Daniel Cleaver in the dust ultimately culminates in a job interview where she is again sexually harassed by the would-be boss who quips, "incidentally, at Sit-Up Britain no one ever gets sacked for shagging the boss. It's a matter of principle."[22] Though the question of Bridget's relationship to feminism warrants further examination, I would like to turn first to a strikingly similar feminist debate between Deborah Kaplan and Harriet Margolis that may offer insights into Bridget's quandary.

In her article, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen," Deborah Kaplan charges Douglas McGrath's *Emma* and Ang Lee and Emma Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* with "harlequinizing" Austen.[23] Echoing critics like Cheryl L. Nixon and Devoney Looser, Kaplan examines the imprint of current trends on Austen's work, and she asserts:

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[20] Imelda Whelehan, "The Bridget Jones Effect." Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism. London: The Women's Press Ltd, 2000. (138).

[21] Whelehan, "Bridget Jones Effect," 138.

[22] Sharon Maguire (director). *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Miramax, 2001.

[23] Kaplan extends the use of the term "harlequin" to encompass the larger genre of romance novels of which the Harlequin Company is the most famous and recognizable publisher.

> The medium of film itself may be neutral, but American-produced popular films generally are not. To put Austen's novels on film by means of corporations (Columbia and Miramax) that produce what is now a global popular culture informed by American tastes is to enter a medium shaped by powerful generic conventions of romance.[24]

Kaplan goes on to argue that Austen's courtship plots are reborn as formulaic romantic comedies in order to reach today's lucrative mass market. Countering this claim, Harriet Margolis examines the term "harlequinization," and she argues that the dismissal of formulaic romance, or harlequins, stems from the general academic devaluation of women-centric novels. Examining similarities between harlequin novels and Austen's novels, Margolis determines,

> In fact, a type of ideological ambiguity associated with women's romance novels (roughly equivalent to an opposition to the effects of capitalism on human interaction) can also be found in Austen's novels…. Consequently, there is neither contradiction nor dishonor in arguing for similarities between Austen's novels and contemporary women's romance novels.[25]

More importantly, Margolis highlights the issue of fidelity that I raise in this thesis as she criticizes Deborah Kaplan's stance: "if authors criticize Austen adaptations for harlequinizing Austen, then they must think that adaptations have in some way betrayed Austen's intentions… being 'so crazy-fond o' books' as virtually to idolize them is not only not a good thing, it is the sort of thing that Austen herself would make sport of."[26] Margolis insists that "the possibility also exists that if these phenomenally successful adaptations have harlequinized the Austen novels, such changes have even been enabled by similarities of some sort that connect the Austen novels with our contemporary phenomenon of women's

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[24] Deborah Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen." Jane Austen in Hollywood. Eds. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998. (180).

[25] Margolis, "Janeite Culture," 25.

[26] Margolis, "Janeite Culture," 25.

romance novels."[27] It is precisely this connection between the modern mass-market romance (whether it be film or novel) and Austen's texts that is most powerfully highlighted by Fielding's and Maguire's adaptations, and which Davies and Birtwistle's adaptation cannot as directly approach within the context of a period-piece. Davies's Elizabeth Bennet may have been shaped by modern feminist attitudes, but she still belongs to the Regency time period represented in the film. Bridget Jones, on the other hand, is the hybrid heroine that represents the romantic female experience of both the past and the present.

In fact, much of the current controversy surrounding *Bridget Jones* resonates with the similar scholarly debates waging in Austen studies. In many ways the catalyst for this discussion, Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* counters critics who read defiant proto-feminism in Austen's work. Butler supports her representation of Austen as a conservative novelist by arguing, "marriage at the end of a conservative novel should be, and is, the fulfillment of a personal moral quest."[28] Further, Butler contradicts those who read Elizabeth Bennet as proto-feminist voice by calling Elizabeth an aberration from conventional heroines the likes of Eleanor Dashwood or Fanny Price: "In *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen might have appeared to err from orthodoxy, not willfully, but through a fault in execution, and she never made the same mistake again."[29] Susan Fraiman also argues for a less overtly feminist reading of *Pride and Prejudice* by noting that Elizabeth is transferred from one father figure to another. According to Fraiman, it is Elizabeth alone who is humbled by the union with Darcy as

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[27] Margolis, "Janeite Culture," 25.

[28] Marilyn Butler, "Pride and Prejudice." *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas.* New York: Oxford UP, 1975. (200).

[29] Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 201.

she is the necessary link in "uniting Mr. Darcy and Mr. Gardiner;" The Darcys' is a marriage of "two classes no less than a marriage of true minds."[30]

On the other side of the Austen debate, Claudia Johnson, Jan Fergus, Judith Lowder Newton and Margaret Kirkham insist upon more overtly feminist readings of *Pride and Prejudice*. According to Fergus, Austen was intensely concerned with the marginal social roles afforded to women and therefore explored the injustices of this patriarchal system in her novels. Fergus contends, however, that Austen subverted her criticism and subtly channeled it into the plot and events of the work rather than directly engaging the audience with her radical viewpoint. Further, Austen sought to soften her social attack by undercutting looming social threats to women with comedy and "happy ending security." [31] Newton also discusses the ways in which Austen undermines patriarchal conventions by conceding that economic power continually resides in male control, but the "real power… involves having the intelligence, the wit, and the critical attitudes of Jane Austen; and Elizabeth Bennet… is essentially an Austen fantasy, a fantasy of power."[32]

The war over Austen's politics and social sympathies continues to wage among these and other scholars. What I find important about these competing claims in connection with my thesis is that each of these arguments can also be equally applied to *Bridget Jones*. While Imelda Whelehan chides *Bridget Jones's Diary* for undermining feminism in popular culture, I would contend that Fielding and Maguire bring a complex ambiguity to the issue, much like the ambiguity Austen maintains in her novels. Neither Fielding nor Maguire will allow the feminist concerns at the core of their work to be simplified, to be

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[30] Susan Fraiman, "The Humiliation of Elizabeth Bennet." *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. (87).

[31] Jan Fergus, "Jane Austen: Tensions Between Security and Marginality." In *History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, edited by Beth Fowkes Tobin. Athens: The U of Georgia P, 1994. (264).

[32] Judith Lowder Newton, "Women, Power and Subversion." In *Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice*, edited by Robert Clark. New York: St. Martin's P, 1994. (133).

reductive, or even to be socially corrective. Whelehan's accusation that *Bridget Jones* allows readers and viewers to "identify" in a "complacent act of self-indulgence" brings to my mind D.W. Harding's essay "'Regulated Hatred': An Aspect in the Work of Jane Austen." Essentially, Harding contends that Austen was a "dedicated satirist" who caricatures the very people she "hates and fears."[33]

This "hate and fear" Harding observes is turned in upon itself in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Fielding and Maguire caricature *themselves* and by extension the female audience they are addressing. Fielding based Shazzar's character in the book upon her feminist-ranting friend Sharon Maguire, and she also based much of Bridget's anxieties and experiences upon her own; addressing the autobiographical component of the adaptations, Maguire admits, "this is definitely a film that veers between broad comedy and truth."[34] Maguire further contends that "Bridget's voice and Bridget's diary voice were very important in the film because what she says and what she does are always two different things," and Maguire asserts that she "thought this was very brave to put down in a book because it was a bit of a taboo subject: a lot of thirty-something women secretly terrified as to why they had not found the right man, but nobody daring to say: 'look, I think I'm a scary, tragic spinster. What shall I do?'"[35] So, in fact, women who hail Bridget as an icon, or who give in to complacent self-indulgence, are missing the caricatured exaggerations of female "thinking" in the same way Harding believes Austen's audience missed her critiques of them.

The "happy endings" offered by Fielding's and Maguire's adaptations are perhaps the most succinct examples of their subversive critique upon modern entertainment depictions of romance and courtship. Rather than reading Austen as a feminist or an anti-feminist, Fielding and Maguire seem most

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[33] D.W. Harding, "'Regulated Hatred': An Aspect in the Work of Jane Austen." In "*Regulated Hatred" and Other Essays on Jane Austen*, edited by Monica Lawlor. London: Athlone P, 1998. (6, 12).

[34] Sharon Maguire, "Director's Commentary." Bridget Jones's Diary. Miramax, 2001.

[35] Maguire, "Director's Commentary."

interested in Austen's unflinching realism. Nina Auerbach argues that women in Austen's novels await the empowered men to free them from their economic and social situations. [36] Fielding and Maguire echo Auerbach's premise since their adaptations demonstrate that in both Austen's day, as well as our own, men have the ultimate power of marriage proposal. If the ability to propose marriage is evidence of social power, then the distribution between the sexes has not fluctuated in the past two hundred years. Women couldn't propose marriage to men in Austen's day, and, though they can, they typically still don't today, even in the fantasy realm of film or fiction. According to Fielding and Maguire, however, examining the paradigm of power wasn't as important to Austen as examining its ramifications in the personal sphere of feminine culture. Instead, deconstructing the structure of feminine friendships, calling attention to the absurdity of social guidelines aimed at shaping women's manners and expectations, and bonding with other women over the shared torture of unnatural and inane courtship rituals are the far more important and more compelling force of Austen's novels.

Fielding and Maguire's adaptations follow the Austen formula that unites romantic love and economic power in the heroine's marriage, yet like Austen, they also subversively call attention to the problems with such a formula. Mark Darcy's grand entrance in the closing scenes of each work saves Bridget, the damsel in distress, from the taboo social existence as a spinster. While Fielding's and Maguire's works provide a contrast to Davies's, which I will discuss later, they diverge from one another in their treatment of the hero. Fielding maintains Austen's ambiguous tone by creating a Darcy who is heroic as well as humbled. Like Austen's Mr. Darcy, Fielding's Mark Darcy proves his love to Bridget by redeeming her family's social reputation in the face of scandal. Austen's Darcy exerts his

[36] Nina Auerbach, "Waiting Together: Pride and Prejudice." *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

social connections and wealth to ensure a marriage between Wickham and Elizabeth's "fallen" sister, Lydia. Likewise, Fielding's Mark Darcy saves Bridget's silly, semi-philandering mother from her unwitting involvement in tax fraud. Like Austen, Fielding casts the love interest as the hero, but she does so in a way that makes him work to earn the heroine's respect and responsiveness. Thus, the question of who ultimately wields the courtship power, hero or heroine, is purposefully left inconclusive. In this way, Fielding's re-invention of this text retains the essence of its original author.

Maguire is a great deal more direct in her interpretation of the power balance in Austen's novel. In her adaptation, Mark Darcy has all the power of courtship since Bridget is left heartbroken when he departs for New York after she has publicly and humiliating admitted that Mark is her "top person, really."[37] Brilliantly echoing the important economic division painted in Austen's novel, Gabrielle's song "Out of Reach" plays in the background during the scene in which Mark arrives in New York and Bridget mourns her romantic loss:

> So confused, my heart's bruised.
>
> Was I ever loved by you?
>
> Out of reach, so far. I never had your heart.
>
> Out of reach, Couldn't see
>
> We were never meant to be.[38]

On one level, these lyrics playing softly in the background poignantly reinforce for the audience Bridget's emotional loss, but the powerful refrain, "out of reach," also underscores the economic division that separate Austen's hero and heroine. One of the central issues scholars point to in *Pride*

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[37] Sharon Maguire, *Bridget Jones's Diary*.
[38] Gabrielle, "Out of Reach," Bridget Jones's Diary Soundtrack. Universal, 2001.

and Prejudice is the stark economic stratification between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. After Lady Catherine de Borough confronts Elizabeth upon the impossibility of a marriage between her and Darcy, Elizabeth herself muses that her own "immediate connections were so unequal to his own."[39] And although Elizabeth reminds Lady Catherine, "[he] is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal," she does admit to herself that Darcy, "with his notions of dignity," would "probably feel that the arguments" his aunt raised "contained much good sense and solid reasoning."[40]

This despondent moment when Elizabeth thinks she has lost Mr. Darcy and confronts the economic impossibility of their match is powerfully mirrored in the film's sequence of Mark Darcy's departure for New York City. Highlighting the economic and social stratification between hero and heroine, Bridget seems entirely out of her element at the Darcys' anniversary party in comparison to Mark Darcy's suave, sophisticated, and elitist fiancée, Natasha. At this pivotal moment in both texts, Darcy is emotionally and economically "out of reach" for the heroine. As the song plays in the film, two series of shots are juxtaposed: a very professional-looking Mark arriving in New York City and a very lonely Bridget hiding in her apartment as she passes the time eating and scribbling in her diary. The film's sequence positions the male hero as belonging to the external professional sphere while the female heroine belongs to the domestic sphere. Maguire's direction foregrounds the all-important division of power and social roles, both in courtship and economy, that Austen's text demonstrates.

Further, Maguire admits that her departure from Fielding's ending was "an interesting feminist dilemma."[41] When Bridget thinks that Mark has walked out on her, now a second time, she races frantically into the snowy streets of London after him in her tiger-striped knickers. She is vulnerable,

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[39] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1996. (290)
[40] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 287,290.
[41] Maguire, "Director's Commentary."

half-naked, and desperate. Despite the image of female vulnerability, I do not view Maguire's ending as inherently anti-feminist. Reading Maguire's "dilemma" as more thematically complex, I see the heavy-handed, overly dramatic, Hollywoodesque ending as a critical statement about love stories in general, both in Austen's day and now. As Harriet Margolis notes, although Austen is "frequently discussed as a satirist whose novels cast a shrewd and critical eye on her society, Austen was also a professional writer with an eye toward sales, especially when publishing her novels was self-funded."[42] While Austen arguably pushed conventional boundaries by giving a voice, even a subtle one, to proto-feminist desires, she was fully aware of the formulaic expectations of her female readership. Therefore, a happy ending, which means the heroine's acquisition of marriage and property, concludes every major Austen novel. Close examination, however, of these scenes in Austen's novels suggests that they are not entirely uncomplicated nor convincing. *Sense and Sensibility* provides perhaps the best example of Austen's notoriously suspicious happy endings: "…and that Marianne found her own happiness in forming his [Colonel Brandon's], was equally the persuasion and delight of each observing friend."[43] Austen scholars such as Susan Fraiman, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Carolyn Heilburn, and Mary Poovey "insist on the inevitably contradictory nature of Austen's novels, which both reproduce conventional beliefs about marriage as the goal of female development and, at the same time, subject those beliefs to scrutiny."[44]

Maguire's direction of the film's closing sequence can be seen in similarly complex terms. The original text of *Pride and Prejudice* and the viewer expectations of the conventional romantic formula necessitate the ultimate union of Bridget and Mark Darcy. Despite the film's adherence to romantic

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[42] Margolis, "Janeite Culture," 34.
[43] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, edited by Ros Ballaster. London: Penguin, 1995, 322.
[44] Fraiman, "The Humiliation of Elizabeth Bennet," (62).

conventions, the dramatic conclusion registers satirical dissent. From the soundtrack tritely crooning "you were the one" in the background, to the fairy-tale snow setting and the classic chase sequence of the heroine rushing to find her man, as well as the layered shots of the final kiss, this film hyperbolizes what women traditionally have been taught to hope for and then be satisfied with. As with all romantic comedies, whether they be in the form of novel or film, the dramatic suspense and miscommunications built throughout the plot encourage us, the audience, to hope that love will win out, and the long anticipated resolution initiates a moment of emotional catharsis for the characters as well as for the audience. Even as the film participates in these conventions, Maguire ruptures the delusive idealism such conventions instigate by exaggerating romantic elements and exchanging the usual glamorous images of the heroine with close shots of Bridget's rippling cellulite and inelegant running shoes.

The exaggeratedly dramatic conclusion, not to mention the contradictory feminist rhetoric expressed throughout the film, are clearly jarring and, I am convinced, meant to highlight the disparity between the independence women are encouraged to claim and conversely what they are socially taught to endure by dating manuals, motherly advice, and romantic comedies. In fact, the epilogue directly contradicts the film's previous characterization of Bridget. As the credits roll, we see a young Bridget apparently free of feminine social strictures. She frolics half-naked in the Darcy's paddling pool, guzzles wine directly from the bottle, and plays with cigarettes—all without shame. By the time she is thirty-something, traumatized by years of dating and her mother's incessant advice for capturing a husband, Bridget's diary records her constant dissatisfaction with her body and her smoking and drinking habits. The female maturation process and the romantic ideals enforced through that process significantly change Bridget from her bohemian childhood to her anxious, self-critical adulthood. Mark Darcy, all the while, remains largely unchanged as he moves from a bow tie-wearing, stuffy child to an emotionally

reserved man. Maguire's romantic conclusion seems less ideal and emotionally satisfying upon further investigation than it might initially appear.

Because Fielding and Maguire adapt the thematic spirit of Austen's work rather than the particulars of dialogue, setting, and costume, they are each able to bring a complexity to the social ideology that Austen's world shares with our own. Constrained by the limitations governing period-piece adaptations, Davies's script for the BBC lacks much of the power of direct application that fuels the *Bridget Jones* controversy. Despite the limitations associated with a "faithful" adaptive approach, Davies's adaptation is no less a work of adaptive criticism than Fielding's or Maguire's. Through camera angles, added scenes, and body language, Davies's adaptation more subtly traces the trajectory from past to present by focusing upon the proto-feminist themes he finds in Austen's novel and developing this toward modern appeal. Seeming to disagree with the position Susan Fraiman takes, Davies argues through his adaptation that Mr. Darcy, not Elizabeth, is the character Austen humbles. Further, he demonstrates that there a variety of powers men and woman can exert, and he continually highlights Elizabeth's separate but equal social abilities.

Primarily, Davies gives Elizabeth the aura of power in his adaptation by feminizing Mr. Darcy. Virginia Blum argues that Firth's performance of Mr. Darcy appeals to a modern audience because "unlike a lot of male heroes, he was a mystery;" she further asserts that "he was in no way a feminized wimp," and that "Colin Firth's beefcake version of Darcy has less to do with the attractions of his body and more to do with a series of sultry and meaningful "looks" spread over the duration of six hours."[45] Certainly, Darcy's sexy and powerful aura proves that he is anything but "wimpy", but "not feminized"?

[45] Virginia L. Blum, "The Return to Repression: Filming the Nineteenth Century." In *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, 157-178. New York: State U of NY P, 2003, 165-166.

Devoney Looser compellingly argues, contrarily, that in many of the recent Austen adaptations the hero figures "frequently find expression as feminized subjects or 'New Men.'"[46] According to Looser, our feminist inclinations require that today's courtship hero must be sensitive. Davies gives us a decidedly "new man" who displays a "visual, indeed a bodily, vocabulary to express what is essentially an emotional redefinition" of his character.[47] He is no longer the vague man who disappears for three-quarters of Austen's novel. He is now, in Davies's hands, a loving, sexually frustrated, and emotionally expressive man. However, Davies purposefully goes beyond creating what Looser terms a "new man." He feminizes Darcy not only to please our modern cultural expectations of the proper hero, but he does so in order to reflect the balance of power he believes Austen depicts, which is a system that allows men economic power and women the power of attraction.

Birtwistle and Davies manipulate the power of the cinematic gaze to redefine Mr. Darcy's character as well as re-position him in his relationship with Elizabeth. According to Laura Mulvey's influential premise in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," men are the active cinematic spectator, thus women are the object of the camera's gaze: "Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as an erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen."[48] Women are denied an identical form of narrative pleasure since "[according] to the principles of the ruling ideology and the physical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of

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[46] Looser, "Feminist Implications," 170.

[47] Cheryl Nixon, "Balancing the Courtship Hero: Masculine Emotional Displays in Film Adaptations of Austen's Novels." In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 22-43. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998, 24.

[48] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16:3, 1975, 11.

sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like."[49] Building from Mulvey's original premise, Lisa Hopkins notes the feminist implications of the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* since this film is "unashamed about appealing to women—and in particular about fetishizing and framing Darcy and offering him up to the female gaze."[50] Davies and Birtwistle reverse the "traditional film form" that Mulvey reproaches by casting Darcy as the dual erotic object of both Elizabeth's gaze as well our own spectatorial gaze.[51] This repositioning of the classically male gaze is important within the context of the narrative since it lends a new level of authority to the heroine. Pointing to the opening scene in which Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley examine Netherfield Park while Elizabeth watches them both from afar, Hopkins suggests that such an opening "…offers an understated but still powerful prefiguration of the extent to which women's views, both literally and figuratively, will be privileged throughout" the adaptation.[52] Expanding upon Hopkins's premise, I would like to point out that while Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley exert their economic power in their appraisal of Netherfield Park, Elizabeth performs her own authoritative appraisal of the two eligible gentlemen entering her neighborhood. It is her gaze and her continual appraisal throughout the film with which the audience identifies and under which scrutiny Mr. Darcy transforms himself.

Throughout the film, Darcy's internal transformation is continuously associated with water—a feminine-coded symbol. Departing from Austen's novel, Davies adds several scenes featuring Darcy to the film, many of which feature a wet Mr. Darcy. Early in the film we see Mr. Darcy enjoying a private moment in the bath as his manservant douses his head and shoulders with water. Later, frustrated with

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[49] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 11.

[50] Lisa Hopkins, "Mr. Darcy's Body: Privileging the Female Gaze." In *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 111-121. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998, 112.

[51] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 18.

[52] Hopkins, "Mr. Darcy's Body," 112.

the process of writing his emotionally difficult letter to Elizabeth, Darcy splashes water on his face and runs his wet fingers through his hair. And of course, at the moment of Darcy-mania formation, Mr. Darcy loosens his restrictive cravat, strips off his coat and dives into the lake at Pemberly. Although Mr. Darcy's forceful dive invokes clear elements of sexual frustration, his correlation with the water is far more complex. The wet images of Darcy build slowly upon themselves through the film and climax in his full submersion in the feminine element. Rather than a sexual innuendo of his "conquering" the feminine, as some critics argue, Darcy submits to it; he becomes one with it. He fully accepts the emotional break that the water represents, and from this moment forward in the film he embraces softer and more feminine modes of expression. In the very next scene, Mr. Darcy is an altered man when he encounters Elizabeth. He has lost the masculine bravado and powerful aloofness. At this point Darcy is truly feminized and only Davies's and Birtwistle's brilliance in casting and directing Firth's inherent virile presence saves him from being, as Virginia Blum terms it, a "wimp." More than just a modern nod toward being a "new man," Darcy is humbled and transformed by the power of his emotional attachment to Elizabeth.

Beyond interpreting Darcy's inner transformation toward egalitarian humility, Davies also raises Elizabeth's position in the match by giving her the power of physical space. Camera angles, setting and motion are used throughout the adaptation to endorse Elizabeth's supremacy. Elizabeth's first demonstration of dominance comes when she encounters Darcy outside Netherfield on her way to Jane's sickbed. Although they are both startled by the chance meeting, Elizabeth quickly takes control of the dialogue by firmly directing Darcy to take her to her sister. With a nod of acquiescence, Darcy does as he is bid and apparently abandons his solitary walk in favor of escorting Elizabeth. At another unplanned outdoor meeting outside of Rosings Park, Elizabeth's presence again proves dominant.

Darcy, on horseback, and Elizabeth, on foot, come upon one another in a clearing. In a scene reminiscent of a dueling match, Elizabeth and Darcy face off in a heated stare, but it is Darcy who turns the reins of his horse and rides back in the direction from which he has come. And most importantly, at their last coincidental meeting at Pemberly, the camera angle gives the distinct impression that Elizabeth is standing uphill from Darcy during their conversation. While Darcy prattles nervously, Elizabeth, though only slightly more composed, looks down on Darcy and smiles a bit condescendingly at his discomfort.

In several scenes depicting the couple, the camera focuses upon Elizabeth as she subtly demonstrates through the raising of an eyebrow or a temporary smirk that she is the wittier, more vivacious, and more romantically dominant figure. In this way, Davies's critical examination of the balance of power in *Pride and Prejudice* falls in line with critics who support proto-feminist readings of Austen's texts. Judith Lowder Newton argues that Austen pays homage to economically driven male superiority but that Austen coyly undermines that dominance with fantasies of a feminine power fueled by intelligence and wit. Clearly, Davies gives overt attention to this idea that Austen values self-possession. The women, such as Lady Catherine's insipid niece, who demonstrate little power of mind and tongue, are marginalized in Austen's novel and Davies's script. Meanwhile, women like Elizabeth, Jane, and Charlotte Lucas exchange knowing glances, participate in witty repartee, and invisibly conduct the flow of conversation; they are all ultimately rewarded with economically secure marriages. Though Darcy posses the economic markers of social superiority, Firth's ability to capture internal turmoil through facial expressions implies that Darcy has succumbed to Elizabeth's powerful charms and that he suffers emotional anguish without her. The scenes which focus on Elizabeth's humiliation in the face of her family's inferiority or her doubts about her own eligibility are outnumbered by the continuous shots of Darcy's emotional struggle over estrangement from Elizabeth. Any humiliation that Elizabeth

exhibits in this adaptation is playful or self-aware; it is never the sort of serious humbling which Darcy undergoes. While remaining impressively faithful to Austen's characters, plot, set, and dialogue, Davies and Birtwistle fill in the vague spaces of the text with images that translate well to a modern audience. Thus they subtly make Austen's nineteenth-century plot speak compellingly to past and present issues of romance.

Beyond blurring boundaries of time, Davies, Fielding and Maguire bring a postmodern flair to their adaptive criticism by blatantly playing upon each other and Austen; appreciating the inter-textuality of these works requires an extra-textual knowledge on the part of the audience. These adaptations expect the audience to bring with them a certain cache of knowledge when examining their work. Though the lucrative successes of their adaptations confirm that enjoyment is certainly not hindered by a lack of requisite knowledge, it is the well-informed viewer who garners the most rewarding experience. The intricate conversation between these three adaptations offers a great deal of material for scholars in the Austen field who are in tune with the traditional canon and the history of adaptation.

"Darcy-mania" is one of the many obvious displays of postmodern play among these interconnected *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations. Andrew Davies resuscitated pop-culture's interest in the romantic aspect of Austen's novel by imbuing his film with an unmistakable sexual tension between his Darcy and Elizabeth. His representation of Austen's arrogant hero openly challenges Marvin Mudrick's long-standing criticism of Austen as a spinster-aunt who, knowing nothing of sex herself, "excludes sexuality from her world." While Mudrick sees Darcy as a "wooden and lifeless male," Davies declares contrarily that Austen's book is "full of people falling in love and breaking their hearts,

eloping with each other and trying to seduce each other."[53] More fully developing the sexual tension that he feels resonates through Austen's novel, Davies added a number of scenes to his screenplay, most of which involve sultry shots of Mr. Darcy. Taking advantage of the new interest Firth's performance inspired in Austen's hero, Linda Berdoll's spin-off novel, *The Bar Sinister: Pride and Prejudice Continues*, was recently re-named and re-published as *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife: Pride and Prejudice Continues*.[54] Lisa Hopkins also notes that "[it] is, perhaps, not coincidental that the implicit focus on Darcy is made explicit in Janet Alymer's 1996 novel *Darcy's Story*, which shows clear signs of having been influenced by the Andrew Davies film version of *Pride and Prejudice*."[55] This widely popular appeal that Davies's adaptation inspired has spawned tremendous material with which Fielding and Maguire have taken great liberty for their own postmodern play.

Fielding openly plays upon the Firth-fetish when she introduces her hero, Mark Darcy. Bridget records her first impressions of the hero thus:

> The rich, divorced-by-cruel-wife Mark—quite tall—was standing with his back to the room, scrutinizing the contents of the Alconbury's bookshelves. It struck me as pretty ridiculous to be called Mr. Darcy and to stand on your own looking snooty at a party. It's like being called Heathcliff and insisting on spending the entire evening in the garden, shouting 'Cathy' and banging your head against a tree.[56]

In a few short lines, Fielding manages to fuse images from Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, and Andrew Davies into one loaded, postmodern compilation. Her description of his name and height point clearly

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[53] Andrew Davies, "Director's Commentary." *Pride and Prejudice*. BBC and A&E, 1995.

[54] Linda Bedroll, *The Bar Sinister: Pride and Prejudice Continues*. London: Well, There It Is Publishers, 1999. Linda Bedroll, *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife: Pride and Prejudice Continues*. London: Landmark Publishers, 2004.

[55] Hopkins, "Mr. Darcy's Body," 115.

[56] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary, 14*

toward Austen's hero and certainly alerts us to the adaptive nature of her book. However, her description of Mark Darcy's stance plays on Andrew Davies's image rather than Jane Austen's. When we meet Mr. Darcy in Austen's novel, we are told that at the Hertfordshire ball, where he makes his first appearance, he was pronounced "to be a fine figure of a man" and was "looked at with great admiration for about half the evening."[57] Austen tells us little more than that he was in great contrast to his amiable friend, Mr. Bingley, "who danced every dance," and that he "spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party."[58]

Though Davies's take on Mr. Darcy's aloofness is faithful to Austen, it is the stoic Mr. Darcy that Firth brought to life that fuels Fielding's description. Fielding compels us to see Colin Firth as Mark Darcy instead of allowing us to imagine our own version of a "fine, tall person." Fielding also smartly articulates her own postmodern play as well as teases her audience about Darcy-mania when Bridget records:

> Jude just called and we spent twenty minutes growling, "Fawaw, that Mr. Darcy." I love the way he talks, sort of as if he can't be bothered. *Ding-dong!* Then we had a long discussion about the comparative merits of Mr. Darcy and Mark Darcy, both agreeing that Mr. Darcy was more attractive because he was ruder but that being imaginary was a disadvantage that could not be overlooked.[59]

Likewise, Colin Firth was Sharon Maguire's immediate casting choice to play Mark Darcy in the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* since it was really Colin Firth playing Mr. Darcy, not actually Austen's Mr. Darcy, whom hoards of women have since idolized. For most of us, when we think of

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[57] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 12
[58] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 12
[59] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 215

"Mr. Darcy," we think of the dark, unmanageable curly hair, dashing sideburns, and smoldering brown eyes of Colin Firth instead of Austen's description of a "fine, tall person" of "noble mein."[60] At one point in the movie, deviating from Fielding's novel, Bridget muses that Mark Darcy should "rethink those sideburns," a comment whose wit is utterly lost if one is unaware of Firth's previous Regency period persona. Indeed, Austen's two-hundred-year-old hero is now a pastiche image whose character and physicality have been shaped by postmodern collaboration.

Beyond the obvious displays of Darcy-mania, critics often miss the more subtle displays of postmodern play between these three adaptive critics. Subtle innuendos populate Fielding and Maguire's adaptations. For instance, in Maguire's adaptation, Daniel's naked mistress smirks at Bridget from behind a book with "Pemberly Press" printed across the cover. In another postmodern display, Fielding incorporates the criticism surrounding films like Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* when Perpetua condescendingly remarks that "in this day and age a whole generation of people only get to know the great works of literature—Austen, Eliot, Dickens, Shakespeare, and so on—through the television," and then asks snidely, "you do realize *Middlemarch* was originally a book, Bridget, don't you, not a soap?"[61] Fielding then turns the popular argument in on itself by having Bridget defend "low culture" and Mark Darcy claim that "Bridget is clearly a top postmodernist," which is a wink toward the very kind of academic blurring Fielding is participating in.[62]

Casting, though obvious with Colin Firth, also offers other more subtle hints of postmodern interaction. Anthony Lane, of the *New Yorker Magazine*, applauds Maguire's casting of Hugh Grant for the role of Daniel Cleaver. He proposes that "it's not that Grant, playing the cad, is on to something

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[60] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 12
[61] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 86-87
[62] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 88

new; rather, the movie has caught up with something half hidden in him—something that directors have, until now, been reluctant to explore"[63] Instead of being a creative casting call, it was a requirement on Maguire's part. No one but Hugh Grant, I am convinced, could have brought the required complexity to the role. I agree with Deborah Kaplan that "some of the actors' past roles 'haunt' their characters" in new Austen adaptations.[64] However, rather than argue that they "haunt" adaptations, which suggests a negative connotation, I would say that past roles *inform* later roles. The actors' histories outside of a film often bring an added dimension to their roles in adaptations. Accordingly, Hugh Grant's portrayal of Edward Ferrars in Emma Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility,* when viewed in connection with his infamous escapades with a prostitute during filming, fuses together his connections with both Austen's oeuvre and sexual promiscuity, thus making him the perfect actor to play the part of a new Austen rogue. In a show of blatant self-awareness and extra-textual referencing, Maguire and Davies collaborated to have Hugh Grant's character admit, "I'm a terrible disaster with a posh voice and a bad character."[65] The inside joke is particularly successful if we understand that Daniel Cleaver, played by Hugh Grant, is actually referring to Grant's own reputation. Daniel Cleaver's role represents a literary cad who must be brought to life by a notorious Hollywood bad boy. Maguire's casting of Colin Firth and Hugh Grant works to multiply the levels of entertainment and inter-textual innuendo in the film.

Maguire also uses subtle camera work to play on Davies's adaptation. Leslie Felperin complains that "Maguire's only glaring thud is the use of slow motion at moments of revelation, which strain too hard for poignancy."[66] Felperin is referring to the scene in which Bridget discovers a naked lady lounging in Daniel's bathroom. Prior to the revelation, both Bridget and the camera move with a

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[63] Anthony Lane, "The Devil and Miss Jones." *The New Yorker*. 77.8 April 16, 2001: (91)
[64] Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen," (181)
[65] Bridget Jones's Diary. Dir. Sharon Maguire. Miramax, 2001
[66] Leslie Felperin, "Thigh Society." *Sight and Sound*. 11.4 April 2001: (37)

quick and purposeful energy; Bridget rushes up the stairs and forcefully throws open the bathroom door. The camera then suddenly switches to dramatic slow motion at the point of realization, and we see a stunned Bridget gasp at the cruel exhibitionist she finds perched on the porcelain bathtub. Maguire, far from being clichéd with her choice of technique, is smartly echoing a parallel scene in Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* when Mr. Darcy throws open a dorm room door to find Wickham, Daniel Cleaver's alter ego, in a similarly compromising position. Darcy's realization of Wickham's true "cad-like" character is similarly accompanied by slow shots aimed at poignancy. Therefore, Maguire's direction of this scene continues the on-going conversation that takes place between herself, Fielding, and Davies.

The parallels between Austen's canonical Elizabeth and Davies's, Fielding's and Maguire's heroines transcends audience demographics by offering thought-provoking material to both academics and non-academics. Davies's work was invaluable in setting the stage for Fielding's and Maguire's more creative and hybrid approaches, but the work of all three adaptations exhibit the new trends developing in adaptive criticism. Each adaptation co-exists with the interests of the academy by responding in one form or another to the major arguments advanced by Austen scholars. At the same time, each adaptation retains the element of entertainment and social awareness that Austen's novels demonstrate. To their credit, none of these adaptations apply themselves entirely to the theory that textual fidelity ensures textual integrity, and they each demonstrate in various ways how challenging such an idea of fidelity can trace interesting correlations between Austen's classic text and modern feminist issues.

CHAPTER TWO

Mixed Messages, Masquerade, and Girl Talk: *Sex and the City* Adapts the Conduct Book Tradition

"Masquerade… constitutes an acknowledgment that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask—as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity."

--Mary Ann Doane [1]

"While women are certainly no strangers to faking it (we've faked our hair color, cup size, hell we've even faked fur), I couldn't help but wonder: has fear of being alone suddenly raised the bar on faking? Are we faking more than orgasms? Are we faking entire relationships? Is it better to fake it than to be alone?"

--Carrie Bradshaw[2]

When *Sex and the City* premiered on HBO in 1999, it was both marketed and received as refreshingly new programming for women. From the show's female character-driven narratives, to its women-driven production team and its tremendous female viewing numbers and merchandising revenue, this women-centered television show certainly has something important to say about the economic influence, sexual desires, and relationship anxieties of the modern female audience that has so enthusiastically embraced it during its six year run. But is it really something new? There is something hauntingly familiar, it seems to me, about the show's set-up: a single/spinster writer capturing on paper the complex dynamics of romantic courtship and gender norms in a way that is both highly entertaining and mildly, though never dramatically, unsettling. Carrie Bradshaw, the show's central character and fictional sex-columnist, channels the sharp wit and astute social eye of Jane Austen in each episode as she sketches out one female quandary after another in the high-stakes world of modern courtship.

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[1] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator." In *Feminist Film Theory*, edited by Sue Thornham, 122-130. New York: NYU P, 1999. 138.

[2] *Sex and the City*: "They Shoot Single People, Don't They?" Season 2, Episode 16. HBO.

Sex and the City comically, and sometimes dramatically, grapples with important female-centric issues such as dating, marriage, women's economic power in a capitalist system, and gender construction. Focusing on these key issues is not, however, new in the domain of women's entertainment. Nineteenth-century sensation novels, conduct books, and novels of manners, as well as the more recent female entertainment offerings such as soap operas, fashion magazines, and self-help books all grapple with these same issues. If the material concerns raised by *Sex and the City* are not entirely new or novel, what is unique about the show is the fact that it offers a single textual site in which all of these other forms are incorporated and represented. By adapting themes we can date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Sex and the City* offers scholars a meta-commentary on the troublesome history of women's entertainment. Within the scope of this thesis, *Sex and the City* offers an example of adaptive criticism in its widest application. Rather than adapting a specific text, as Davies, Fielding, and Maguire do in their approach to Austen, Candace Bushnell and the HBO scriptwriters adapt the larger themes and stereotypes that underwrite much of Austen and other nineteenth-century women writers' work. Studying *Sex and the City*'s representation of gender on both the level of textual delivery and audience reception alongside similar proto-feminist representations demonstrates a surprisingly unbroken tradition of female social training and feminine construction that can offer important insights into current literary and theoretical study. Despite the tremendous advances of first and second-wave feminism, *Sex and the City* represents an interesting dilemma that has yet to be resolved: the co-dependent relationship between women and the texts that teach them what it means (or should mean) to be a woman.

The premise of Candace Bushnell's book that gave rise to the cable series can be dated back to the conduct book genre that began in the mid eighteenth century. Beginning first as a

small column in the *New York Observer* in 1994, *Sex and the City* was meant to be, in Bushnell's words, "an unsentimental examination of relationships and mating habits" that "[set] out to answer one burning question—why are we still single?"[3] Beneath all of its sexual sensationalism and pseudo-fiction (reportedly based on real life events), *Sex and the City* is essentially another female conduct text that examines courtship and offers advice, guidance, and examples to entertain and instruct its female audience. There is certainly much more to be said for the series than this somewhat over-simplified summary would suggest, but for the moment I would like to point out how the series functions in the long-standing tradition of female conduct material because, as I will argue later, the germinal themes found in eighteenth-century conduct books can be traced through subsequent "female" entertainment.

Beginning in the eighteenth century "an entire body of literature emerged that was devoted exclusively" to the cultivation of femininity and female nature; as Mary Poovey observes, "[instructions] about proper conduct appeared in the numerous periodicals addressed specifically to women, in more general essay-periodicals like the *Spectator*, and the in the ladies' conduct books." Further, they were "directed primarily to the middle classes and [were] intended to educate young women (and their mothers) in the behavior considered "proper," then "natural," for a "lady."'[4] While the definition of "propriety" and "proper" female conduct may have changed radically over the past three centuries, the delivery of these social gender norms to female audiences has not: texts are still used to demonstrate the models of proper behavior. Like 'Dear Abby,' Carrie and her friends discuss and portray the guidelines for modern female manners in each *Sex and the City* episode. Questions ranging from break-up protocol and how early in a relationship a woman can (or should) have sex, to proper attire for funerals and

[3] Candace Bushnell, *Sex and the City* (New York: Warner Books, 2001), ix.
[4] Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984), 15.

weddings, the *Sex and the City* gals personify, perhaps in conflicting and interesting ways, the codes of social etiquette still governing modern women.

In their work on the conduct book genre, scholars Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong both argue that the conduct book was largely responsible for creating a monolithic social representation of the female gender in Western culture. Poovey argues in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* that as the shift from a feudal to a capitalist system emerged in Britain, an anxiety developed concerning the role should play in capitalism. Since the biblical Eve, female sexual desire has been equated with a lack of self-control and irrationality. Because women were now being seen as consumers who had access to their husbands' money, male anxiety compelled the creation of a social identity for women that discouraged these destructive flaws and curbed their potential power. Therefore, a new "nature" was constructed for a "proper woman." The conduct texts taught them the importance of being a proper lady who was chaste and passive, and "by the end of the eighteenth century, in fact, "female" and "feminine" were understood by virtually all men and women to be synonymous."[5]

As with most social transformations, money was the driving force behind this motivation to reform women. Since a woman's infidelity could produce illegitimate heirs of her husband's titles and property, her chastity was primarily an economic concern. Also, since a woman's influence over the household budget could jeopardize her husband's finances, her prudence and conformity to her husband's desires were also economically desirable. In reaction to these growing socio-capitalist concerns, "the last two decades of the seventeenth century saw an explosion of writing that proposed to educate the daughters of numerous aspiring social groups," and these texts encouraged a "new domestic ideal" that "not only provided a basis on which numerous competing social groups could each identify their interests but also provided a form of

[5] Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, 6.

power exercised through constant supervision and the regulation of desire, thus preparing the cultural ground in which capitalism could rapidly flourish."[6]

As capitalism flourished, so too did the tradition of training women to adopt and internalize the "proper" ideals for their gender. Addressing the continuing relevance of conduct material, Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse contend:

> If information that sought to refine a woman's judgment, taste, demeanor, speech, and dress once existed in such abundance that it eventually changed the way literate people understood themselves in relation to others, representations of women have no less power today. With the development of the mass media such representations saturate the culture as never before.[7]

Indeed, the power of the "proper" ideal is no longer restricted to the literate audience since magazine covers, billboards, and Internet advertisements propagating the sexy feminine ideal are virtually impossible to miss. The relatively homogenous female image glorified throughout the entertainment and media industries encourages women (as well as men) to believe that there is, in fact, a physical and behavioral ideal of femininity that women should strive to attain or maintain. By extension, these images encourage female dependence upon the texts that define and perpetuate this gendered identity. Fashion magazines, self-help guides, and even fictional entertainment thrive, at least in part, because they offer women the advice and tools necessary to play the role of "woman" properly. Two problems thus arise from this tradition: the powerful subliminal message that "femininity" must be correctly enacted in order to gain social approval

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[6] Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, Introduction. In *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality*, edited by Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, 1-24. New York: Methuen, 1987. 10, 12.

[7] Armstrong and Tennehouse, *Ideology of Conduct*, 5.

and, consequently, women's dependence upon the implied authority of such texts for guidance in correctly performing their social role.

By the mid nineteenth century, the social mores of the conduct book had become mainstream throughout women's writing and in fact lent credibility to women writers. As Poovey argues, bluestockings such as "Elizabeth Montague, Emily Boscawen, Hester Chapone, and Hannah More were significant because they preserved their unimpeachable reputations *and* published for profit and public esteem. Thus they helped elevate what had been genteel amateurism into an acceptable professional career."[8] Jane Austen also concerned herself literarily "with the complex relationship between a woman's desires and the imperatives of propriety."[9] According to Harriet Margolis, "Austen's governing principles of life were generally those espoused and promulgated by the influential conduct books of her youth…. From such books Austen learned what her society respected and valued."[10] Fostered by the professional credibility afforded by advocating propriety, the genres of the domestic novel, the sensation novel, and the novel of manners came into being. Whatever the personal beliefs or politics of writers such as Austen, the Brontë sisters, or Maria Edgeworth may have been, the female-targeted fiction they published routinely advanced the fortunes of the socially proper heroine and punished or eliminated the promiscuous or improper female characters. Thus, "[together] with conduct books and other literature that claimed to be directed at women readers, novels helped to redefine what men were supposed to desire in women and what women, in turn, were supposed to desire to be."[11] In fact, Armstrong contends that these ideals did not diminish with the decline of the

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[8] Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, 37.

[9] Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, 172.

[10] Harriet Margolis, "Janeite Culture: What Does the Name "Jane Austen" authorize?" In *Jane Austen on Screen*, edited by Gina Macdonald and Andrew F, 22-43. Macdonald. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 22.

[11] Armstrong and Tennenhouse, *Ideology of Conduct*, 11.

conduct books in the late eighteenth century, but instead had "passed into the domain of common sense" and became the invisible "frame of reference" in novels.

Building on Armstrong's contention, I argue that this invisible frame of reference continues to exist even now in twenty-first-century women's texts. As Tania Modleski contends in *Loving with a Vengeance*, the women's genres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which were influenced by the conduct books, have in turn influenced the modern Harlequin novels and soap operas.[12] Equally popular and influential, self-help books like Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider's *The Rules: Time Tested Secrets for Capturing Mr. Right* that began gaining momentum in the late 1980s clearly echo their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century counter parts. Fittingly, the influence of these classic texts and their modern manifestations comes full circle as they, in turn, have influenced writers like Helen Fielding and Candace Bushnell in their post-modern adaptations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's writing and fictional themes.

Sex and the City combines and reflects the major genres of women's entertainment. The series is part soap opera (delivering weekly installments of a continuing female drama), part advice column (as Carrie delivers a finished column each week within the frame of the show and delivers relationship advice to the female audience outside of the show), part self-help book (offering options and examples of empowerment enacted by each of the four female characters in relation to the single problem dominating each episode), and part fashion magazine (displaying and initiating trends and rituals associated with fashionable femininity). What each of these genres has in common with each other as well as with their historical forbearers is the ways in which they subliminally and powerfully reinforce the importance of femininity as it is socially

[12] In *Loving With A Vengenance* (New York: Routledge, 1988), Modleski contends that the soap opera is a direct descendent of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sensation novel, and the modern Harlequin descends from the sentimental novel. She makes clear in both cases that these historical forbearers were influenced by and reflected the social attitudes promulgated by the conduct books of their time (see Chapters 1,2, and 4).

defined and constructed. By adapting the Austenian archetype of the single woman depicting and examining her social sphere, *Sex and the City*, for better or worse, exemplifies the contemporary training in mixed messages and gendered identity that has haunted the history of women's entertainment.

The feminist theory of masquerade, first brought into discourse by Joan Riviere in 1929, provides a useful tool for discussing the pervasive theme of gender construction and social training in women's entertainment. What is particularly important about the concept of masquerade is that it articulates a gendered mask of identity; as in Greek theatre, there is a standard mask that one assumes to identify their role (tragic or comic) on the stage. In her article "Womanliness as a Masquerade," Riviere argues that what is taken for granted as "natural" in female behavior and appearance is instead a mask of femininity: "Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods."[13]

The theory of masquerade is part of a larger feminist discourse that argues that gender is perfomative. For scholars like Judith Butler, Claire Johnston, and Mary Ann Doane, gender is a system of signs that cultures designate to each sex: for example, dresses, make-up, and dolls are feminine signs associated with the female, while trousers, cigars, and trucks are masculine signs associated with the male. According to these scholars, biology is responsible for a minimum of differentiation between the male and female sex, yet these external signs become so socially ingrained that they are ultimately assumed to be natural inclinations rather than artificial constructions. Riviere argues that women exaggerate femininity in their attitudes, dress, and

[13] Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade." In *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, edited by Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek. New Haven: College and University P, 1966. 213.

social skills in order to mask their masculine qualities (intelligence, ambition, etc.) that would otherwise threaten men and instigate reprimand. Although subsequent scholars such as Butler, Johnston, and Doane have each taken Riviere's premise in different directions, all argue for a construction of gender that is governed by socially driven (i.e. male-driven) expectations.[14] Arguably, eighteenth-century conduct books solidified the mask of femininity that was available to, or forced upon, women. According to Armstrong and Tennenhouse,

> …this change in the representation of desire produced a culture divided into gendered spheres, the primary difference between "masculine" and "feminine" then creating the differences between public and private, work and leisure, economic and domestic, political and aesthetic. All the important themes subtending capitalism and enabling economic practices to make sense in turn rested upon the assumption that such differences are as natural as gender itself.[15]

Assumed "natural" gender differences and their cultural associations date further back than the eighteenth century, as far back as the author of *Genesis* at least, but it is this capitalist emergence in the eighteenth century and its advocating of the "proper lady" that solidifies the now stereotypical mask of femininity as well as its reliance on textual instruction.

It is precisely within this domain of gender construction and feminine masquerade that *Sex and the City* has become a troublesome text for feminist consideration. Though the show seems to advocate female empowerment, many viewers accuse its sexy gloss and endless parade of fashion labels (Fendi, Manolo Blahnik, etc.) of dangerously reinvesting in very old and very problematic stereotypes. Rather than simply accusing or defending the series, I think it is more

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[14] See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990, Revised 1999), Claire Johnston's "Femininity and the Masquerade" (*Jacques Tourner*, London: British Film Institute, 1975, 36-44), and Mary Ann Doane's "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator" (*Screen* 23: 3-4, 1982, 74-87)

[15] Armstrong and Tennenhouse, *Ideology of Conduct*, 15-16.

important and productive to examine how the images and dialogue reflect and contribute to current social attitudes toward gender. As I argued earlier, *Sex and the City* essentially works within the frame of conduct texts by offering advice and modeling female behavior. Using the advice column format, the show explores female sexuality and its appropriate expression in each episode. According to Poovey, female conduct texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century advocated chastity and the repression of female sexual urges. Conversely, *Sex and the City* apparently advocates open female sexual expression.

Although the definition of female "propriety" has changed significantly, regulating female sexual practice is still the central issue of these texts. In one episode, Carrie discovers that her highly successful fashion editor at *Vogue* is sexually involved with a married man, which the editor justifies by declaring, "I have a career—I don't have time for a full-time relationship. That's the key to having it all: quit expecting it to look like what you thought. That's the key to the Fall line, and it's the key to relationships."[16] In several episodes, Carrie questions whether or not women can have sex like men—without emotional attachment. Each episode argues that theoretically women are capable of "just sex," in the form of affairs, flings, and relationships built on trysts rather than monogamous commitment. In episode 73, however, Charlotte, the stereotypical "good girl," experiments in "just sex" with Harry Goldenblatt, the lawyer who turns her stomach initially but whom she ultimately marries. In the series' premiere episode, Carrie's first encounter with Mr. Big proves that falling in love is better than casual, man-like sex. In episode 20, Miranda takes a male approach to her one-night-stand with Steve, but her attitude appears cold and selfish in comparison to Steve's desire for emotional intimacy. By the series finale, Miranda and Steve are happily married with a baby. In many ways, *Sex and the City* problematizes the feminine masquerade by disrupting the social signifiers classically assigned to

[16] *Sex and the City*, "Plus-One is the Loneliest Number," Season 5, Episode 71. HBO

genders. Men like Steve and Smith are sympathetic, monogamous, and communicative while Carrie, Miranda and Samantha are sexually aggressive and promiscuous. On the other hand, the show continues to naturalize the masquerade by insisting on this connection between female "conduct" and female sexual behavior.

Candace Bushnell's *New York Observer* column set out to determine "why are we still single," and the HBO series seems to imply that these sexual mores are part of the courtship process that helps a woman secure a husband. Speaking to *Sex and the City*'s mixed sexual messages, Imelda Whelehan argues:

> [Carrie] and her close female friends are represented on one hand as children of the sexual revolution, able to fulfill their desires without censure; yet all their sexual adventures lead them in pursuit of more permanent relationships, and at times implicitly suggest that through sex one can subordinate oneself to male desires and in doing so catch a partner.[17]

Like the conduct books and courtship novels of the past, *Sex and the City* sets heterosexual marriage as the ultimate goal and uses each of its installments to show women what to do (or what not to do) in order to get there. Not only does *Sex and the City* demonstrate the performative aspects of sex, it also highlights the performative aspects of sexiness.

It is no small coincidence that *Sex and the City* has an overt connection to fashion magazines. Carrie incessantly reads them, becomes a contributor to *Vogue*, and the show itself looks like a fashion magazine in motion with its obsessive attention to labels and trends. Internationally famous fashion designer Vera Wang affirms this correlation, commenting:

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[17] Imelda Whelehan, *Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 2000), 139-140.

"Carrie is somebody who expresses her emotion through fashion."[18] The series highlights women's fashion magazines and their glorification of female sexiness.[19] Scholars have long recognized such magazine's power in shaping feminine ideals. Following in the footsteps of eighteenth-century conduct books and women-targeted periodicals, the fashion magazine simultaneously trains its readers to be ideal women as well as ideal consumers. Welehan notes, "Women's magazines by no means give us an accurate picture of the lives of real women today, but they do tell us much about the dominant female consumer as envisaged by such organs."[20] Essentially, Welehan argues that fashion magazines may not offer an accurate or realistic depiction of women, but it does depict the sexy consumer that these magazines and their advertising clients seek to construct. The confident and appealing magazine models imply that women can achieve these feminine ideals if they purchase trendy products and fashion labels. Again we can see that the goals of women's texts have changed, but the themes and the approach remain largely the same. Instead of reigning in the financial power of female consumers, as was the goal in the eighteenth century, now magazines encourage women to exercise their economic influence. By projecting a sexy ideal as well as advertising the necessary products, fashion magazines "play on a sense of lack, the feeling that women 'want' to be themselves but haven't quite got there yet."[21]

Whether these texts encourage or discourage certain spending habits, a woman's economic influence motivates the feminine construction that these texts advocate. Labeling this

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[18] *Sex and the City*, "Farewell Tribute," HBO, 2004

[19] Throughout this chapter I use the term "fashion magazine" to refer to the larger genre of glossy women's magazines, including magazines such as *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan*, and the proliferation of teen-targeted spin-offs. The term "fashion magazine" is not limited to high-fashion magazines such as *W* or *Vogue*.

[20] Whelehan, *Overloaded*, 143.

[21] Whelehan, *Overloaded*, 145.

phenomenon the "beauty system," Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell attack this issue in harsher terms:

> She can accept herself as she is, or she can enter the beauty system, motivated by a belief in her own deficiencies as the taken-for-granted baseline condition justifying the numerous and often bizarre operations deployed against her body…. For a young girl to accept herself "as she is" is not an easy choice. She is drawn into the beauty system by the force of her entire culture, by the design of the overall relationship between the sexes. When she looks in the mirror and sees the ugliness reflected back upon herself, what she is actually experiencing is the value that her society has placed on her gender category, that she has no value. And the approved cultural response is to pick up a pencil and paint and try to draw a human face on this nothingness, a beautiful face.[22]

In her study on the lack of positive "tough girl" images in popular magazines, Sherrie Inness notes that "[it] is difficult for *any* woman in American society to avoid these magazines: even women who argue that they never read them are still influenced by their omnipresent images."[23] As Whelehan, the MacCannells, and Inness point out, fashion magazines encourage, and in fact normalize, standards for feminine construction; sexual availability and physical attractiveness being the ideals primarily advocated.

The fashion magazine's role in naturalizing the masquerade offers two interesting points of consideration for this thesis. First, Whelehan and other scholars point out that the fashion magazine is a form of entertainment. While this genre of text arguably disempowers women, it is one that many women willingly turn to for relaxation and enjoyment. According to Linda Grant,

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[22] Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell, "The Beauty System." In *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*, edited by Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, 206-238. New York: Methuen, 1987. 214.

[23] Sherrie A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998), 51-52.

"underlying every woman's magazine is the notion that this publication represents in some way or other an indulgence, an escape; it is the moment in the day which women have to themselves…"[24] Secondly, the genre of fashion magazines and its inherent contradictions get imported into many postmodern adaptations. The crucial issue here is that these mixed messages pertaining to feminine construction are not actually inflicted upon women but, ironically, underwrite the very material they seek out for enjoyment and *escape*. Highlighting the dangerous convergence of these entertainment genres (magazine and adaptation), Whelehan argues:

> The importance of all of this is that women are being confronted with images which they knowingly acknowledge as unreal ideals, but which link into wider cultural beliefs about body image and which, by their very ubiquity, reinforce those beliefs. Such messages are contradictory, so it is not surprising to see young women identifying with fictional characters like Bridget Jones who diet on one hand and yet attempt 'feminist' resistance on the other.[25]

Indeed, many modern women can identify with Bridget Jones's rant: "…I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by super-models and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices. I can't take the pressure."[26] Commenting upon this same problem, *Sex and the City*'s episode entitled "Models and Mortals" explores the social expectations inscribed by fashion magazines:

> Miranda: We should just admit that we live in a culture that promotes impossible standards of beauty.
>
> Carrie: Yeah, except men think they're possible.
>
> Charlotte: I just know no matter how good I feel about myself, if I see Christy Turlington, I just want to give up.

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[24] Linda Grant, "Meanwhile, Back in the Real World," *Guardian*, 25 November 1997, 8.
[25] Whelehan, *Overloaded*, 146.
[26] Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996) 52.

Miranda:	Well, I just want to tie her down and force-feed her lard, but that's the difference between you and me.
Carrie:	What are you talking about? Look at you two: you're beautiful.
Charlotte:	I hate my thighs…. I can't even open a magazine without thinking: "thighs, thighs, thighs."
Miranda:	Well, I'll take your thighs and raise you a chin.
Carrie:	I'll take your chin and raise you a… (points at her nose)
Samantha:	I happen to love the way I look.
Miranda:	You should. You paid enough for it. (Girls all laugh)
Carrie:	I find it fascinating that four beautiful women could be intimidated by some unreal fantasy. I mean look (holds up a copy of *Glamour* magazine) is this really intimidating to any of you?
Charlotte:	I hate my thighs!
Carrie's Voice-Over:	Suddenly I was interested. If models could cause otherwise rational individuals to crumple in their presence, exactly how powerful was beauty?[27]

Sex and the City and *Bridget Jones's Diary* bring a post-modern sense of self-reflexive critical awareness to the entertainment genres in which they are engaging and adapting by highlighting these problems with beauty standards and socially constructed ideals. Both texts emphasize and attack the issue in a way their eighteenth and nineteenth-century counterparts did not and could not. However, the stable romantic unions delivered by the end of both texts reinforce the long-held tradition that women must perform femininity (even if they do so badly, as in Bridget's case) in order to ensure romantic fulfillment. Thus, in a sense, these texts continue to participate in and encourage the very systems they seek to question. This slippery problem of coupling

[27] *Sex and the City*, "Models and Mortals," Season 1, Episode 2. HBO

objection with compliance defines much of women's entertainment from Austen's day to the present.

Nineteenth-century writers such as Jane Austen deftly recognized the masquerade in which women participate and often attempted to deal with it by demonstrating a distance or separation between *social* expectations and *personal* female experience. For example, Charlotte Lucas, in *Pride and Prejudice*, observes the protocols of proper femininity by acquiescing passively to each of her husband's wishes and appropriately encouraging and agreeing with his endless commentary upon Rosing's Park and Lady Catherine de Bourgh; however she demonstrates her shrewd understanding of the difference between the personal and the social, or the masquerade and reality, as she notes to Elizabeth:

> …it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude and vanity in almost every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all *begin* freely—a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew *more* affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on.[28]

Clearly, there is a divergence between how a woman feels and how she must act in order to satisfy male expectations and ultimately ensure her social livelihood through marriage. A man's perception of a woman should never be mistaken for a woman's perception of herself according

[28] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 21.

to Charlotte. She argues that a woman must show more affection, not necessarily feel more affection.

Like Austen's novels, *Sex and the City* attempts to separate the personal *female* sphere from the socially constructed *feminine* sphere by featuring more girl-talk scenes (phone conversations, the weekly brunch, etc.) than romantic scenes. Paralleling Austen's distinct narrative structure, each episode is "told by a third-person narrator intimate with the consciousness of the female characters and usually at a distance from the mental lives and daily activities of men" who are relatively marginalized within the narrative.[29] As with Austen's novels, the audience is invited into the private lives and thoughts of the central female characters, but no such equal access is granted into the male characters who are rarely featured outside of their involvement with the female characters. Echoing Deborah Kaplan's reading of Austen, *Sex and the City* also seems to "[render] female alliances more important than heterosexual relationships."[30] Although the show seems to prioritize female alliances, these alliances are centered almost exclusively around heterosexual relationships. In Austen's novels, the courtship plots and romantic endings are arguably marginalized; they provide the frame story within which the more important depictions of female relationships and female culture are explored. Within *Sex and the City*, the courtship and sexual plots provide the basis for all female community. The social expectations that govern the masquerade, including the expectation that women desire marriage and love above all else, no longer seem externally imposed but, instead, internalized as we move from Austen to *Sex and the City*. Objecting to this very state of affairs, Miranda vents:

> All we ever talk about anymore is Big, or balls, or small dicks. How does it happen that four such smart women have nothing to talk about but boyfriends? It's like seventh grade

[29]Deborah Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women, and Courtship in Two Film Adaptations," in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, eds. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998), 180.

[30] Deborah Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 157.

> with bank accounts. What about us? What we think, we feel, we know? Does it always have to be about them?[31]

Carrie's voice-over confirms, "in the case of Miranda Hobbes versus silly women everywhere the verdict was in: guilty as charged."[32] By the episode's end, however, Miranda's position is undermined. An encounter with her own ex-boyfriend reminds Miranda that she is being too hard, too masculine, in her expectations, and the episode fades out as the two women re-bond over yet another discussion of Mr. Big.[33]

Throughout the series, *Sex and the City* has participated in a number of mixed messages. While the show purports to challenge and deconstruct unnatural feminine stereotypes as well as to encourage alternative choices and lifestyles, it has also tended to reinforce and naturalize these same stereotypes. The two characters who most challenge the masquerade of femininity, Miranda and Samantha, are each rehabilitated back into the proper feminine ideal in different ways. Miranda Hobbes represents the post 1980s stereotype of the masculine businesswoman. She is the no-nonsense, anti-romantic professional who competes for promotion in a male-dominated law firm. She takes the dominant position in her on-again off-again relationship with her sentimental boyfriend Steve, and she often supplies the voice of cold, hard reason during the girl-talk brunches. But Miranda's validation of such a non-traditional female identity as a viable and satisfying option is subtly contradicted. Executive Producer Michael Patrick King notes, "the joy of the series has been to watch [Miranda] make more and more mistakes and learn from those mistakes. So, we put obstacles in front of her that made her open up. It's really been fun to see her become softer and how much harder it is to be soft than to be hard."[34] Though Miranda

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[31] *Sex and the City*: "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," Season 2, Episode13. HBO
[32] *Sex and the City*: "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," Season 2, Episode 13. HBO

[34] *Sex and the City*, "Farewell Tribute," HBO, 2004.

remains the least sentimental, or least "girly," character, she assumes the most traditional roles of wife, mother, and parent care-giver by the series finale.[35]

Samantha Jones's masculine libido also challenges the ideal of femininity that implies women aren't as aggressive, sexual, or self-satisfied as men. From the show's premiere in 1999, Samantha has been a tribute to female sexual liberation without apology. However, her promiscuity has also been questioned in several episodes. After being caught in a compromising position with a potential business associate, a bitter wife "takes out a social hit" on Samantha. Turned away from the best restaurants and social functions in New York City, Samantha must accept shame and appeal to the Queen socialite of Manhattan: "What do you want me to say? I'm a whore? All right. I'm a whore. There, I've said it."[36]

Perhaps more disturbingly, Samantha's libido brings about her own downfall in precisely the way the conduct books and novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries warned. Samantha complains to Carrie that she is sexually bored with her very young boyfriend Smith, and she desires an older and more aggressive sexual partner.[37] After bumping into her ex-boyfriend, Richard, at a party, the camera cuts to an unsettling shot of the two engaged in a sexual situation. Though Samantha is there by her own consent, the sexual encounter is clearly degrading. Looking into the mirror (and the camera), her face registers regret, self-disgust and sadness during the entire act. When confronted with her loyal boyfriend who has waited patiently to "make sure [she] gets home safely," she falls into his arms crying and admits that she doesn't know what is wrong with her or why she has done this to him. This scene arguably reinforces the traditional concept that sexually aggressive women aren't capable of being fulfilled by their liberal sexuality or that female promiscuity is a sign of weak character

[35] *Sex and the City*, "An American Girl in Paris: Part Deux." Season 6, episode 94. HBO
[36] *Sex and the City*, "Four Women and a Funeral." Season 2, Episode 17. HBO
[37] *Sex and the City*, "Let There Be Light." Season 6, Episode 1. HBO

and poor judgment. Samantha's character continuously confronts the old female stereotypes that pit virgin against whore, honor against pleasure, or proper against transgressive and calls these limiting binaries into question. At the same time, however, several scenes insinuate that an aggressive female libido is still dangerous and can ultimately drive even a strong, confident woman into disempowering situations.

In her work on women's popular entertainment, Tania Modleski highlights two tropes that are consistent between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels and current women's fiction. First, Modleski argues, "[like] the Harlequins of the present day, the [sentimental] novels repeatedly insisted on the importance of the heroine's virginity."[38] Like the Harlequin, the heroines' sexual behavior or conduct in *Sex and the City* is of primary importance within the narrative. Unlike the sentimental novels and modern Harlequins, *Sex and the City* does not insist on virginity. But as we have seen, a woman's sexual conduct is equally politicized, focused upon, and regulated in a way that men's sexual conduct has never been equally scrutinized or directed by society or fiction. By changing the definition of what is sexually acceptable while maintaining the same cultural emphasis on female sexuality, *Sex and the City* adapts a troubling old trope of women's entertainment for a new generation.

Modleski also discusses the fictional tradition of reforming the rake, and *Sex and the City* adapts this formula too. Throughout eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels "whether or not a rake would really reform was a burning question," and several novelists grappled with how a virtuous heroine could drive her desired rake to sacrifice his libertine lifestyle in favor of settling down.[39] Sharing the same roguish traits and narrative suspense, yesterday's rake has become today's commitment-phobe. *Sex and the City*'s entire six-year series is framed by Carrie's love-

[38] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 17.
[39] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 17.

hate relationship with Mr. Big. Even the name itself implies a sexual mystique often associated with the rake. By the end of the first episode, Carrie is smitten with this man who radiates devilish charm, boyish sweetness, and economic power, but he is also clearly not the marrying type. Over the ninety-four episodes of the series, the couple goes back and forth on the issues of marriage and monogamy. Carrie gets excited when Big allows her to keep a toothbrush at his apartment, but she's then immediately disappointed when he objects to the implied intimacy of co-signing a gift card with her.[40] Many audience members were on the edge of their seats when Big seemed finally on the verge of denouncing his bachelor ways after his heart surgery, but they were disappointed as he recovered both his health and his non-committal attitude.[41] Finally, the night before Carrie is to depart for Paris and her exciting new relationship with Alexander Petrovski, Mr. Big re-enters her life yet again. This time Carrie, like every formulaic heroine, declares herself immune to his charm and finally unavailable.[42] But this modern rake has finally learned his lesson and, like every classic rake in romantic fiction, been transformed by his love for the heroine; Big pursues Carrie to Paris, admits his love for her, and brings her back to New York where they will settle down together and, we assume, live happily ever after.[43]

From reforming the rake, to politicizing female sexual behavior and advocating the proper modes of social etiquette, *Sex and the City* thematically adapts the major genres of women's entertainment. Much like Helen Fielding and Sharon Maguire's work in *Bridget Jones's Diary, Sex and the City* takes a postmodern approach to adaptation as it self-reflexively comments upon women's fiction and women's gender construction even as it participates in

[40] *Sex and the City*, "The Chicken Dance." Season 2, Episode 19.
[41] *Sex and the City*, "The Domino Effect." Season 6, Episode 85.
[42] *Sex and the City*, "An American Girl in Paris: Part Une." Season 6, Episode 93. HBO
[43] *Sex and the City*, "An American Girl in Paris: Part Deux." Season 6, Episode 94. HBO

them. In relation to Austen specifically, but I believe appropriate to *Sex and the City* as well, Mary Poovey contends:

> Austen substitutes aesthetic gratification—the pleasures of the 'light and bright and sparkling' plays of wit—for the practical solutions that neither her society nor her art could provide. That we do not more often feel shortchanged by this sleight-of-hand attests to the power of her artistry and to the magnitude of our own desire to deny the disturbing ideological contradictions that have made such imaginative compensation necessary.[44]

What I think is so appealing to women about these genres of entertainment, including self-help books, fashion magazines, soap operas, and the new postmodern adaptations that combine them all, is that they uniformly focus upon female experiences, typically offer strong heroines, and entrench the audience in a world where a woman's importance is elevated and affirmed. Further, they offer a fantasy in which these female experiences are rewarded by happy endings. The danger that I think they represent is that they routinely normalize the feminine masquerade and unconsciously authorize external texts as the normative standard by which women conduct or perceive themselves; their omnipresent influence shapes from an early age what women desire in themselves, of their bodies, and in their romantic relationships. *Sex and the City* is important within the context of adaptive criticism because it both adapts old themes for new audiences as well as highlights the contradictions and tensions at the heart of these three-hundred-year-old genres. While some scholars and critics reproach the series for its contradictions, *Sex and the City* offers an important point for feminist examination because it asks us to consider why women historically respond so well to these texts.

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[44] Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, 207

CHAPTER THREE

Digital Gothic:
Mary Shelley's 'Birth-Myth' Haunts *The Matrix*

"In reality, the mother as mater, material, matrix, and the repression of that element by Western culture might well be regarded as the source of several notoriously "Gothic" emotions—horror and terror above all."

--Anne Williams[1]

In the first two chapters of this thesis I focused primarily on the sentimental tradition as I argued that a new approach to adaptation is necessary in order to better investigate the ways in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's fiction informs current popular entertainment. Initially, "sentimental" may seem a limited label for encompassing all of the genres and writers discussed in the previous chapters. After all, Jane Austen, the novelist central to my examinations of *Bridget Jones* and *Sex and the City*, is generally classified as an anti-sentimental writer. While this distinction is appropriate, Jane Austen as well as the other writers and genres I have hitherto examined all share important common ground that can productively be categorized within the larger context of sentimental literature: the courtship novel, the novel of manners, the domestic novel, conduct texts and so on are all based in Realism, allegedly representing real and recognizable contexts, and each reinforce, at least superficially, patriarchal social structures through their insistence on marriage as the right and desirable female aspiration. [2] A discussion of the adaptive relationship between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

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[1] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness* (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1995), 11.

[2] Essentially, sentimental novels privilege emotion and sensibility over pragmatism or reason in the behavior of their heroes and heroines. Drawing out the problems inherent in this tradition, Jane Austen and William Thackeray are two of the most notable *anti-sentimental* writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, though neither of them prioritizes sensibility above reason in their texts, neither do they entirely undermine or wholly censure such values. Further, the traditional romantic endings of their novels ultimately uphold the patriarchal social structure in much the same way as sentimental writers. Thus, by

women's fiction and current pop culture would be incomplete without an examination of the sentimental's darker side, its "other"—the Gothic tradition. As I argue in my discussion of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Sex and the City,* the postmodern literary adaptations that I term adaptive criticism can be found in unconventional and unexpected places, places that traditional adaptation scholarship cannot go. Intimately tied to the sentimental tradition, the Gothic too has been adapted by the modern age to tell old stories with new cultural implications. The *Matrix* trilogy provides perhaps the most provocative case of adaptive criticism in the Gothic genre. Adapting Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* specifically, as well as Gothic themes more generally, Andy and Larry Wachowski's *Matrix* trilogy is a provocative text that demonstrates the need for challenging traditional, fidelity-based approaches to adaptation.

As Gothic scholarship has gained academic legitimacy and momentum over the past two decades, scholars have begun to explore the interrelationship between sentimental and Gothic literature. According to Mary K. Patterson Thornburg, the sentimental and the Gothic are essentially two sides of the same myth. Beginning in the eighteenth century, sentimental literature's purpose was "to reflect and reinforce the rationality, morality, and controlled emotionality of its culture."[3] Because its emphasis on decorum and acquiescence to social protocol "represents a cultural effort to repress and deny the darker aspects of human reality," the sentimental tradition by itself is incomplete; it is only one half of the literary and cultural equation.[4] Thornburg argues then that Gothic is "a completion of the sentimental, a

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questioning or critiquing the tradition but never fully breaking with it, it seems to me that such writers can indeed be appropriately discussed within the larger domain of the sentimental genre.

[3] Mary K. Patterson Thornburg, *The Monster in the Mirror: Gender and the Sentimental/Gothic Myth in Frankenstein* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 4.

[4] Thornburg, *The Monster in the Mirror*, 22.

body of material unacceptable to the conscious sentimental tradition but complimentary to it."[5] In her own revisionist work upon Gothic scholarship, Anne Williams argues that Gothic literature, until quite recently, has been dismissed as "Romanticism's exiled Black Sheep."[6] Scholars like Williams, Ellen Moers, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have brought to light the important relationship that exists between Gothic and Realism. In fact, Williams calls Gothic "the "otherness" that the Realists and the Romanticists had defined their favored literary modes *against*: the supposedly irrational, the ambiguous, the unenlightened, the chaotic, the dark, the hidden, the secret."[7] Unique in many ways among its Gothic peers, *Frankenstein* emphasizes this symbiotic relationship by merging both Realism and Gothic within its narrative structure, and as Thornburg observes:

> Whereas Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis…transport their sentimental characters into exotic settings to depict the confrontation between the individual and his apparently alien self, Mary Shelley heightens the drama of this confrontation and at the same time reveals its nature more truly by bringing the alien element into the familiar settings of the characters' lives.[8]

Unlike so many of the films that purport to adapt *Frankenstein*, *The Matrix* echoes Shelley's narrative tension between Realism and Gothic through its double-frame structure: the "reality" of the real world juxtaposed against the dark fantasy of the Matrix. In this and other ways, *The Matrix*, while not *strictly* adapting *Frankenstein*, can be situated uniquely between Shelley's classic novel, current pop-culture entertainment, and the cultural anxieties that they both share and reflect.[9]

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[5] Thornburg, *The Monster in the Mirror*, 4.
[6] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 8.
[7] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 8.
[8] Thornburg, *The Monster in the Mirror*, 72.
[9] I have chosen to use the 1818 edition of Shelley's text within this examination. Despite the changes between the 1818 and 1831 editions, I believe that both texts ultimately support the reading advanced by the *Matrix*. However, I have chosen the 1818 edition because, as Anne Mellor notes when she compares Shelley's editions with the two editions of Wordsworth's

Perhaps no Gothic tale has had more influence upon the last century of filmmaking and adaptation than Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Spanning the horror, science fiction and even slapstick genres, Shelley's "mad scientist" eclipses even Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in image replication, narrative allusion, and as a mythic icon. The scenario of flawed creation run amok has become an immediately recognizable and standard trope from *The Looney Tunes* to *The Munsters* and throughout more serious television and film productions. *Frankenstein* has become a modern myth in part because it is exceptionally open to interpretation and application. Chris Baldick suggests that Shelley's novel became her monster, her hideous progeny, because she "had unwittingly endowed it with a quality even more monstrously ungovernable than the deadly strength, size, and agility given to his creation by Frankenstein: an abundant excess of meaning which the novel cannot stably accommodate, a surplus of significance which overruns the enclosure of the novel's form to attract new and competing mythic revisions."[10] Not only does the novel support a plethora of diverse readings, but it also crystallizes a cultural condition that continues to characterize modern thinking: the precarious position of human ingenuity and imagination in a technical age of possibility. As Baldick explains, *Frankenstein* is continually powerful because "the myth which develops out of it turns repeatedly upon these new problems of an age in which humanity seizes responsibility for re-creating the world, for violently reshaping its natural environment and its inherited social and political forms, for remaking itself."[11]

Beginning with the films produced by Universal Pictures in the 1930s and 40s and the British Hammer Films of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, the history of *Frankenstein* adaptations and spin-offs is

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Prelude, "the first completed version of both works have greater internal philosophical coherence, are closest to the authors' original conceptions, and are more convincingly related to their historical contexts." Mellor, "Choosing a Text of *Frankenstein."*

[10] Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1987), 33.

[11] Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 5.

marked by its tendency to close off interpretative engagement with the text, rather than opening it up. Whether the films strive for horror, comedy, or even a moral appeal, Frankenstein films that directly invoke the now classic deformed "monster image" make choices that necessarily exclude other approaches to the text. For example, in films that render the monster inarticulate, clumsy, and essentially mechanical, Victor's perspective and experience as creator drives the narrative and the meaning. The majority of these films directly or indirectly force the audience to identify with either creator or creation, but not both. Further, science, progress, and fear are the primary themes examined or experienced with little attention paid to Shelley's other, subtler questions regarding education, social construction, and female experience in a patriarchal system. Unlike Shelley's novel, these traditional[12] takes on *Frankenstein* refuse an "excess of meaning" that "overrun the enclosure" of the text. My purpose here is not to condemn the long and rich history of Frankenstein cinema. Rather, I would simply point out that these films while entertaining and useful to Romantic and Gothic discourse in their own way, demonstrate the constraints of bringing Shelley's novel in its entirety to screen. Even Kenneth Branagh's film, which foregrounds its literary heritage by placing Mary Shelley in the title, advances a reading that denies narrative complexity to virtually all of the novel's characters outside of Victor and Captain Walton.[13] Given these limitations, I do not find it surprising then that a film that refuses a mimetic, or

[12] Within this context I am defining "traditional" as any film that directly references Shelley's text either through title, character names, or (and especially) by image reference to the monster. I would also like to note that while Shelley's monster's description remains vague throughout the novel, it was the early Universal films starring Boris Karloff that universalized the monster's stock image. Even so, when films reference the stock image, which is not Shelley's, they are still in fact evoking Shelley's character, not differentiating in any real way between text icon and film icon.

[13] Brannaugh's rendition invites the audience to share in Victor's "madness", sympathize with his best intentions, and apply his experience to Captain Walton's parallel circumstance by cinematically "telling" the story primarily through these two narrators. The monster's crucial perspective is severely restricted by the emphasis placed on his rage, howling vengeance, and persecution of Victor. The film's closing shots position the audience within Captain Walton's perspective, and while he does clearly pity the monster, he does not sympathize with him. Thus, the monster is a key element of what is primarily Victor and Captain Walton's story.

perhaps even conscious, approach to *Frankenstein* could offer a more robust exploration of Shelley's text. [14]

A comparison of theme and setting alone makes clear a correlation between the *Matrix* and *Frankenstein*. Neo's story is quite simply the story of a creation, an aberrant creation no less, struggling to find his creator and thereby discover his own meaning and identity within the system to which he was born. Conversely, the *Matrix* gives us a god-like creator whose ambitions to create a perfect system are continually frustrated and who seeks to destroy this flawed creation (the Matrix). The confrontation between Neo and the Architect in *The Matrix Reloaded* poignantly echoes the similar confrontation between Victor and his monster on Mont Blanc. A close examination of these parallel scenes draws out the important philosophical questions both texts seek to interrogate. The monster describes his situation thus:

> …Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You propose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life?….Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands…. On you it rests, whether I quit for ever the neighbourhood of man, and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge of your fellow-creatures, and the author of your own speedy ruin.[15]

Echoing key themes from the monster's speech, the Architect explains,

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[14] Throughout this chapter "the *Matrix*" will be used to refer to the entire text of the trilogy. However, when referring to the first film individually, it will appear as "*The Matrix*." Also, after the first mention of both films' full titles, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions* will afterwards be referred to as simply "*Reloaded"* and *"Revolutions."*

[15] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 66-67.

> Your life [Neo] is the sum of a remainder of an unbalanced equation inherent to the programming of the Matrix. You are the eventuality of an anomaly, which, despite my sincerest efforts, I have been unable to eliminate from what is otherwise a harmony of mathematical precision. While it remains a burden assiduously avoided, it is not unexpected, and thus not beyond a measure of control. Which has led you, inexorably here. The first Matrix I designed was quite naturally perfect; it was a work of art, flawless, sublime. A triumph equaled only by its monumental failure. The inevitability of its doom is apparent to me now as a consequence of the imperfection inherent in every human being. Thus, I redesigned it based on your history to more accurately reflect the varying grotesqueries of your nature. However, I was again frustrated by failure….You are here because Zion is about to be destroyed—its every living inhabitant terminated, its entire existence eradicated….Which brings us at last to the moment of truth, wherein the fundamental flaw is ultimately expressed, and the anomaly revealed as both beginning and end. There are two doors. The door to your right leads to the Source, and the salvation of Zion. The door to your left leads back to the Matrix, to her [Trinity] and to the end of your species. As you adequately put, the problem is choice.[16]

The monster and Neo are both faced with their own annihilation at the hands of their creator. Victor calls his creation an "abhorred devil" and a "detested form," and the Architect likewise refers to the "grotesqueries" of human nature. Victor's intention to create "a new species" of "many happy and excellent natures" becomes his "catastrophe" just as the Architect's "work of art," his "harmony of mathematical precision," is a "monumental failure."[17] In both cases, the creation faces its own

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[16] Wachowski brothers, *The Matrix Reloaded*.
[17] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 32.

destruction in order to erase the flaws inherent in their creators' designs. Most intriguingly, a "devil's choice" is offered in both exchanges. In Shelley's text, it is the creature who offers Victor an impossible choice: either to create yet another flawed being or to choose his own destruction. In *Reloaded*, it is the creator who offers an equally impossible choice: Neo must choose to either save the one he loves (Trinity), or choose the survival of the human race. In both texts, "the *problem* is choice" (my emphasis).

As I will discuss in more detail later, the subtle religious themes underwriting both texts force an unsettling confrontation with a patriarchal religious ideology that blames all systemic flaws on creation rather than creator. In both texts, the pivotal confrontation between creator and creation is at the heart of the story and is appropriately located in the middle of each narrative: for Shelley, the scene appears in the second of the three volumes, and for the Wachowski brothers the parallel scene is located in *Reloaded*, the second of the three films. With its emphasis on this and other key images, *Reloaded* more directly engages with *Frankenstein* than either *The Matrix* or *The Matrix Revolutions*; but it is the trilogy as a whole that bears out two of the most important aspects of Shelley's novel: the crucial role Gothic plays in telling such a story and the reflection of a culture in crisis.

In many ways, the *Matrix* merges science fiction with its predecessor, the Gothic, but unlike many modern films, the *Matrix* remains firmly entrenched in the Gothic tradition. Like the *Terminator*, *Alien*, and *Star Wars* films, the technology, otherworldly and futuristic elements that generally define science fiction are present in the *Matrix*. The film's opening scenes are decidedly sci-fi: computer programming codes pour across the opening credits, a cryptic computer message commands Neo to follow the white rabbit (referencing yet another nineteenth-century text), the mysterious delivery of a cell phone initiates the first chase scene, and Trinity produces a high-tech machine to debug Neo. However,

once Neo is faced in a dark, rainy alley with the decision to either return to the life he knows or continue on his quest to find Morpheus, we move into the realm of Gothic. Against a backdrop fit for Count Dracula himself, Neo meets Morpheus in an abandoned building complete with billowing drapes, peeling paint, and creaky stairs as thunder peels ominously and lightening streaks outside the dark windows. It is this

Morpheus (Laurence Fishburn) offers Neo (Keanu Reeves) a choice of the red pill or the blue pill against a Gothic backdrop inside the matrix. (© Warner Brothers)

pivotal scene that introduces the central theme of the film: to what extent is social ideology responsible for the personal experience of reality? The film's Gothic approach to this powerful question is appropriate given Anne Williams's assertion that "Gothic is a discourse that shows the cracks in the system that constitutes consciousness, 'reality.' It is a language that signals a revolution within the established system. It reveals a kind of fault line within the imagination that may open up in prose or in verse, in lyric or drama or narrative, in popular or "serious" art."[18] It is indeed a "revolution with the established system" that the movie advocates. Morpheus describes the powerful invisibility of the established system, or the dream you are "unable to wake from," using the kind of language Marx applied to the concept of ideology:

[18] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 66.

Morpheus: Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know, you can't explain. But you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there...like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Neo: The Matrix?

Morpheus: Do you want to know what it is? (Neo nods) The Matrix is everywhere. It's all around us, even in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you pay your taxes. The Matrix is the world that has been pulled over your eyes, to blind you from the truth.

Neo: What truth?

Morpheus: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.[19]

Cultural ideology, or the story that is created by those in power to pacify those who are not in power, is the invisible lie or "the *world* that has been pulled over your eyes, to blind you from the truth" (my emphasis). Neo finds that this world, a world experienced by the viewer as "reality," is in fact a digital illusion. This challenge to the familiar, both inside and outside the film text, draws heavily on Gothic tenets. Tania Modleski highlights this particular feature of the Gothic as she notes that "Gothics can present us with the frighteningly familiar precisely because they make the familiar strange—which is, it will be recalled, the way Freud said the uncanny sensation in literature is produced."[20]

The *Matrix* repeatedly points to its own reliance on Gothic conventions such as the uncanny and déjà vu to show the "cracks in the system," or as Morpheus terms it, "the splinter in your mind" that resists ideological programming. For example, after Cypher turns Judas against his crew, Neo

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[19] Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski (writers and directors). *The Matrix*. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1999.

[20] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 20.

experiences déjà vu as a black cat, a superstitious symbol often used in the Gothic, twice crosses his path. Realizing the dangerous implications of Neo's experience, Trinity explains, "a déjà vu is usually a glitch in the Matrix...it happens when they change something."[21] Again highlighting the Gothic symbols that undermine the system, the Oracle tells Neo:

> The Oracle: Look, see those birds? At some point a program was written to govern them. A program was written to watch over the trees, and the wind, the sunrise, and sunset. There are programs running all over the place. The ones doing their job, doing what they were meant to do, are *invisible*. You'd never even know they were here. But the other ones, well, we hear about them all the time.
>
> Neo: I've never heard of them.
>
> The Oracle: Of course you have. Every time you've heard someone say they saw a ghost, or an angel. Every story you've ever heard about vampires, werewolves, or aliens is the system assimilating some program that's doing something they're not supposed to be doing.[22]

The Oracle points out precisely what Gothic language and its associated symbols signify within the system. Working in much the same way as Freud argued in his dream analysis, these symbols are unbidden images outside of conscious control; they do not reference themselves but instead point to unsettling issues that the conscious mind, or the established system, cannot comfortably confront and accommodate. In another self-reflexive move that highlights the film's use of Gothic elements to tell its story, Persephone shoots her husband's evil henchmen with silver bullets while the television screen behind her plays a classic vampire film. Beyond simply setting a dark tone for the films, these Gothic symbols are associated with the rebellious elements or characters that seek to undermine and bring to conscious awareness the invisible systems governing "reality." Persephone, the Merovingian, and their

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[21] Wachowskis, *The Matrix*.

[22] Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski (writers and directors). *The Matrix Reloaded*. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2003.

fellow rogue programs are not on Neo's side, nor are they on the side of the machines that control the Matrix. They are programs that the Matrix cannot assimilate into its control, so they too are allied with the disruptive power the Gothic wields against social programming.

I find it significant that ideology assumes the form of digital technology in the *Matrix*. Marxist theories long discussed within the academy now take on a new sense of fear and urgency amongst a pop-culture audience through these films. *The Matrix* urges viewers to wonder if they too could be "plugged in" to a system outside of their control and consciousness. More disturbing still, could a monster of their own making enslave them? The dark prophecy at the heart of the *Matrix* is the subjugation of the entire human race by the machines of their own design: A.I. (artificial intelligence), Internet technology, telephones, and other systems that facilitate human communication and connection. Morpheus laments,

> [At] some point in the early twenty-first century all of mankind was united in celebration. We marveled at our own magnificence.... as we gave birth to A.I., a singular consciousness that spawned an entire race of machines…. Throughout human history, we have been dependent on machines to survive. Fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony.[23]

Bearing out Baldick's explanation of *Frankenstein*'s mythic appeal, the human race becomes Victor's heir as the *Matrix* projects Shelley's tragic tale to its greatest extreme. Rather than simply prophesying doom or vilifying scientific and technological progress, these texts are hauntingly powerful because they reflect in its full complexity the current fears and anxieties of their historical moment. Such complex and disturbing ideas that unsettle social complacency appropriately find their voice in Gothic discourse.

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[23] Wachowskis, *The Matrix*.

In addition to exploring the "mad-scientist" side of the *Frankenstein* myth, the *Matrix* also grapples with the gender and birth issues that traditional *Frankenstein* adaptations so often diminish or entirely ignore. Since the 1970s, scholars have begun to emphasize the importance of gender dynamics in Romantic and Gothic texts, due in large part to the canonical revisionist work of feminist scholars. Ellen Moers introduced the term "female Gothic" and "birth myth" into the academic vernacular in 1976 as she emphasized the gendered role of writer and the gendered experience of reader in "Female Gothic."[24] Moers argues that as early as the 1790s, Ann Radcliffe transformed the Gothic novel into "a feminine substitute for the picturesque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction" as well as made "the Gothic into a make-believe puberty rite for young women."[25] Advocating the importance of gendered subjectivity inside and outside the novel, Moers declares,

> …no other Gothic work by a woman writer, perhaps no other literary work of any kind by a woman, better repays examination in the light of the sex of its author. For *Frankenstein* is a birth myth, and one that was lodged in the novelist's imagination, I am convinced, by the fact that she was herself a mother.[26]

Reading the monster's creation and abandonment in light of Mary Shelley's tragic miscarriages and postpartum suffering, Moers established the importance of a female subjectivity within this Gothic text. In 1979 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's landmark work *The Madwoman in the Attic* further opened up the investigation of the gender dynamics driving female authorship. Emphasizing a very different aspect of Shelley's novel but no less insistent upon the point of female subjectivity, Gilbert and

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[24] Printed first in the *New York Review of Books* then later revised for inclusion in her book *Literary Women* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976).

[25] Moers, *Literary Women*, 92.

[26] Moers, *Literary Women*, 92.

Gubar address the "woman's reading" of *Paradise Lost* offered in *Frankenstein*: "It is in the earlier, lonelier works, in novels like *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*, that we can see the female imagination expressing its anxieties about *Paradise Lost* most overtly. And *Frankenstein* in particular is a fictionalized rendition of the meaning of *Paradise Lost* to women."[27]

Advancing the work begun by Moers and Gilbert and Gubar, Anne K. Mellor and Anne Williams each elaborate upon the significance of gendered subjectivity (for writer as well as reader) by outlining the binary formulas found in Romanticism and Gothic.[28] Both scholars argue that writers inhabit a gendered domain within their texts; however, the domain they inhabit in a text is not necessarily determined by their own sex. Thus, we can see feminine modes of expression in John Keats and perhaps masculine modes in Mary Wollstonecraft. Addressing the crucial issue of gendered subjectivity, Williams explains, "Patriarchy assumes that the male self is normative, "universal," and transcendent—representative of "mankind." Gothic, however, reveals both the cost such an idea imposes on the male and the very different tale the female subject has to tell."[29] Williams goes on to argue that "the "Male" and "Female" traditions employ two distinct sets of literary conventions…. from the 1790s onward, these conventions offer the author a matrix of creative innovation: a chance to write "the unspeakable" in "Gothic."'[30] What I would like to add to this growing discourse of gender subjectivity is an exploration of the ways in which Mary Shelley deploys both sides of the binary as well as the ways in which the *Matrix* trilogy brings such subjective multiplicity to screen. Adding to Chris Baldick's theory, I think Shelley's novel is not only open to obsessive mythic revision because of its applicability to the problems

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[27] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University P, 1979), 221.

[28] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988).
Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness*.

[29] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 100.

[30] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 100.

of the modern age, but also because Shelley created a textual site where a multiplicity of identities intersect so that every reading of the text has the potential to become an act of re-creation.

Frankenstein defies complacent subjectivity inside and outside its text. We, as readers, cannot wholly identify with either Victor or the monster, nor can we stand apart from and condemn either character. Neither character is inherently male or female, nor can we engage vicariously in our own gendered experience through them. Moers suggests that Radcliffe enjoyed acclaim because her texts allowed women to identify with and enact their own "puberty rite." *Frankenstein* complicates this gendered extra-textual experience by merging the male with the female and allowing us to experience both dynamics and perspectives simultaneously. *Frankenstein* offers both the "male Gothic" and "female Gothic" formulas that Williams lays out in *Art of Darkness*. According to Williams, the "female Gothic generates suspense through the limitations imposed by the chosen point of view; we share both the heroine's often mistaken perceptions and her ignorance. Male Gothic derives its most powerful effects from the dramatic irony created by multiple points of view."[31] Contributing to early feminist work on *Frankenstein*, Moers suggested that "*Frankenstein* brought a new sophistication to literary terror, and it did so without a heroine, without even an important female victim."[32] The power of Moers's observation lies in its emphasis on Shelley's departure from the traditional Gothic formula; however, later feminist critics, Gilbert and Gubar most notably, disagree that *Frankenstein* lacks either a heroine or an important female victim, pointing to both Victor's "birth" process of creation and the monster's oppressive social experience as being clearly female-coded. If we accept the monster as a subverted or perverted heroine, then we recognize a key female Gothic structure at work. During the monster's

[31] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 102.
[32] Moers, *Literary Women*, 91-92.

monologue atop Mount Blanc, we share in the tragedy of his mistaken perceptions and his ignorance. All that we hitherto know of the monster's actions, seen through Victor's eyes, is suspended as we wholly experience the suspense of his/her tale. However, Shelley will not allow us to remain within the heroine's perspective as we are continually forced into both Victor and Walton's subjective positions and through them realize the "dramatic irony created by multiple points of view."

The supernatural elements in *Frankenstein* which bring together Gothic and Realism are also the elements that transcend the male and female Gothic formulas. Williams suggests, "whereas the female tradition of Gothic explains the ghosts, the male formula simply posits the supernatural as a "reality," a premise of this fictional world."[33] So while the supernatural, or the "alien self," is brought into the domain of Realism, as Thornburg suggests, it is done so in such a way that it retains both its rational and irrational nature. Following the example of Radcliffe's "ghosts," the monster's creation is governed by rational explanation. Victor continuously highlights the scientific, and thus repeatable, formula of his process as he describes his trips to charnel houses and his "days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue."[34] Whether it is ego or wisdom that motivates him, Victor refuses to disclose the specific steps by which he imbues life. He maintains both the rational and the mystical as he claims,

> I paused, examining and analysing all the *minutiae of causation*, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and wondrous, *yet so simple*, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised that among so many men of genius, who had directed their inquiries toward the same science, that I alone should be

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[33] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 103.
[34] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York: Norton & Company, 1996), 30.

> reserved to discover *so astonishing a secret*. Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman…. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were *distinct and probable* (my emphasis).[35]

Contrasting the "minutiae" with the "wondrous" and the "distinct and probable" with "miracle" draws on both sides of the gender binary: infusing male-coded reason with female-coded emotion, melding supernatural male Gothic with rational female Gothic, and blurring birth-mother with biblical father. Gender roles dynamically conflict and interact throughout *Frankenstein* creating a gender dialectic; and it is this continuous dialectic, this ever-changing and progressing subjectivity, which I believe explains the novel's unique openness to new readings and new film re-creations. The challenge then in bringing *Frankenstein* in its "entirety" to screen lies mainly in the inability to invite the viewer into multiple character perspectives, such as is the case with Kenneth Brannagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Seen entirely through Captain Walton and Victor's narrative perspective, Brannagh's film locks the viewer into one interpretation, a singularly male subjectivity, which then excludes other approaches to the text.

Because it does not offer a mimetic approach to the text and thus side-steps the tricky problem of narrative perspective, the *Matrix* trilogy can more openly engage in cross-gendering and multiple perspectives. The very title of the trilogy opens up the intersection between gender and subjective positioning. In the context of computer technology (the film's thematic vehicle), "matrix" denotes "an interconnected array of diodes, cores, or other circuit elements that has a number of inputs and outputs and somewhat resembles a lattice or grid in its circuit design or physical construction."[36] The other

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[35] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 30.
[36] "matrix," *Old English Dictionary* (OED) 2nd Edition.

connotation, little discussed in academic work regarding the *Matrix*, derives from late Latin and denotes "uterus or womb" and "pregnant animal or female animal used for breeding."[37] Both definitions reflect a governing system: one mechanical and the other biological, one logically driven and the other intuitively or naturally driven. Taken together they contrast the classic gender binary in which human beings are socially positioned. In the films, the Matrix exists in the mind; it is the mathematical program installed by the Architect, the father of the system, to pacify the human beings under his control. In essence, the Matrix then is the digital representation of the Law of the Father, but this father works in conjunction with a mother. Machine wombs, mechanical pods of uteral goo, develop human babies and nurture the

Growing human babies in the mechanical
Matrix womb (© Warner Brothers)

human bodies asleep inside them. The Matrix itself, acting as Victor's double in many ways, is gendered as both tyrannical father and grotesque mother. Williams argues that the Patriarchal family provides the organizing myth of the literature we call Gothic:

> Like all dreams—even nightmares—Gothic narratives enabled their audiences to confront and explore, and simultaneously to deny, a theme that marks the birth of the Romantic (and modern)

[37] "matrix," *Old English Dictionary* (OED) 2nd Edition.

> sensibility: that the "Law of the Father" is a tyrannical *paterfamilias* and that we dwell in his ruins.[38]

Within the tyrannical paterfamilias governing Western culture, Williams further argues that "the mother as *mater*, material, matrix, and the repression of that element by Western culture might well be regarded as the source of several notoriously "Gothic" emotions—horror and terror above all."[39] This organizing myth clearly drives the gender dialectic in Shelley's Gothic tale, and the *Matrix* powerfully makes visual these deeply embedded cultural anxieties.

Addressing the same tyrannical paterfamilias that Williams finds compelling in the Gothic, Anne K. Mellor argues, "one of the deepest horrors of this novel is Frankenstein's implicit goal of creating a society for men only."[40] The Matrix echoes this horror both Williams and Mellor articulate. Women are no longer necessary for their biological function in this machine dominated and male-coded dystopia. Mellor goes on to point out:

> What Victor Frankenstein truly fears is female sexuality as such…. Frankenstein's fear of female sexuality is endemic to a patriarchal construction of gender. Uninhibited female sexual experience threatens the very foundation of patriarchal power: the establishment of patrilineal kinship networks together with the transmission of both status and property by inheritance entailed upon a male line.[41]

According to Mellor's reading, "Mary Shelley's novel thus portrays the penalties of raping Nature."[42] Such a reading, according to Williams's definition, belongs in the male Gothic domain:

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[38] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 24, 29.
[39] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 11.
[40] Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism*, 274.
[41] Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism*, 279.
[42] Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism*, 283.

> Male Gothic confirms Susan Griffin's thesis in *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge against Nature*. As the subject declares, the premise that culture is "male" and nature "female" engenders through the Oedipal crisis a privileged adult male subject who bears in his unconscious the lost, seemingly all-powerful mother. This terrible, desirable figure—so early forbidden by the Law of the Father—excites both yearning and hatred. And whatever is culturally feminine, including women and nature, may bear the burden of this obscure will to revenge, serving as an object to the controlled, violated, desecrated.[43]

Pairing Mellor's reading of *Frankenstein* with Williams's explanation of male Gothic preoccupations is particularly useful for drawing out the gender dialectic driving both *Frankenstein* and the *Matrix*. Victor's loss of his mother to scarlet fever drives him in his quest to "penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places."[44] He enacts precisely the Oedipal will to revenge that Williams argues drives male Gothics. Unlike the male formula, however, Victor is punished for transgressing Nature, as Mellor notes. What I would like to suggest through this comparison is the unique cross-gendering and cross-gendered anxieties in which Shelley participates. Even though Victor's violence represents the patriarchal fears typically associated with male Gothic, *Frankenstein* vacillates and creates an on-going conversation between the two formulas. While I agree with Mellor's reading, I'd like to take the problem of gender one step further. Rather than simply punishing Victor because he is *male* and because he violates *feminine* Nature in an attempt to create a male-dominated society, I think Victor represents both male and female, both bad mother and bad father. Carrying Percy Shelley's illegitimate child, renounced by her progressive father, and reared on her mother's

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[43] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 107.
[44] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 28.

feminist writing, Mary Shelley occupied a unique cultural and gender position at the time of *Frankenstein*'s conception. She must have been all too aware of the patrilineal-driven social fears that condemned even her own female sexuality. She was routinely exposed to male modes of expression and thought raised as she was in Godwin's household and living as she did among Percy and Byron. She must have seen motherhood from both sides: as abandoned child and as an anxious mother-to-be facing the birth and raising processes. All of these influences came to bear, I believe, on the complex relationship she drew between Victor and his creation. Victor is condemned not only for transgressing nature or for his hubris, but also for being a remote and loveless God, a father who will not teach his child, and a mother whose loving spirit dies in birth: "For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart."[45]

The roles of mother and father, of male and female, are equally fluid and dynamic in the *Matrix*. The kindly, motherly Oracle exists to aid the citizens of Zion. We assume for much of the first two films that, even though she too is a program, she exists outside of the machines' control, much like the Merovingian or the Key Maker. She tells Neo where "the path of the One ends" and thus where he must go; when he gets there he finds that the relationship between she and the Architect, or the machine world, is more complicated than he could have known. The Architect explains,

> I have since come to understand that the answer eluded me because it required a lesser mind, or perhaps a mind less bound by the parameters of perfection. Thus the answer was stumbled

[45] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 34.

upon by another—an intuitive program, initially created to investigate certain aspects of the human psyche. If I am the father of the Matrix, she would undoubtedly be its mother.[46]

Highlighting the partnership between them, the Architect tells Neo, "rest assured, this will be the sixth time *we* have destroyed it, and *we* have become exceedingly efficient at it" (my emphasis).

With zealous loyalty, Morpheus has lived his life and lead his followers by his belief in the Oracle and her prophesies. Neo finds that these prophecies were not intended to save Zion but meant through him to destroy Zion:

Neo: If we don't do something in 24 hours, Zion will be destroyed…..
I was told it would happen.

Morpheus: By whom?

Neo: It doesn't matter. I believed him.

Morpheus: That's impossible, the prophecy tells us...

Neo: It was a lie, Morpheus. The prophecy was a lie. The One was never meant to end anything. It was all another system of control.

Morpheus: I don't believe that.

The Matrix Reloaded's conclusion leaves us in the shadow of motherly abandonment as Morpheus's faith is finally broken: "I have dreamed a dream, and now that dream has gone from me."[47] By *Revolutions*, however, the relationship between mother and father is further complicated:

Neo: The Architect told me that if I didn't return to the Source, Zion would be destroyed by midnight tonight.

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[46] Wachowski brothers, *The Matrix Reloaded*.

[47] Wachowski brothers, *The Matrix Reloaded*.
Daniel 2: 3,5: "And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.... the thing is gone from me." (King James version)

Oracle: (Rolls her eyes) Please... You and I may not be able to see beyond our own choices, but that man can't see past any choices.

Neo: Why not?

Oracle: He doesn't understand them—he can't. To him they are variables in an equation. One at a time each variable must be solved and countered. That's his purpose: to balance an equation.

Neo: What's your purpose?

Oracle: To unbalance it.[48]

Exemplifying the gendered categories of the binary, the Oracle represents the intuitive and emotional nature of the mother while the Architect represents the logical, calculated nature of the father, yet the two work *together* through an *antagonistic* relationship. The Architect is thwarted in his attempt to destroy this most recent version of the Matrix along with all its inhabitants. However, the Oracle's "dangerous game" only buys temporary peace, and we are left to infer that the game will start again; the system will go on being balanced and unbalanced, continue its cyclical *revolutions* via male and female influence. This on-going gender dialectic is in fact the only stability the trilogy's final installment, *Matrix Revolutions*, offers.

As I alluded to earlier, religious roles remain bound up with gender roles. Visually enacting Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's examination of *Frankenstein* as a woman's reading of *Paradise Lost*, religious symbols and challenges to patriarchal scriptures surround the main characters in the *Matrix* trilogy. Names such as "Trinity" and the "Nebuchadnezzar" highlight the film's reliance on religious motifs. Plot devices such as the apocalyptic threat against Zion, Neo's rebirth as "The One" after his death at the hands of Agent Smith, and Neo's self-sacrifice in a blinding cross-shaped light

[48] Wachowski brothers, *The Matrix Revolutions.*

emphasize Christian themes. While *Revolutions* is heavily stepped in especially Christian coded symbols, I do not read these films as didactically supporting such an ideology. In fact, I would contend that these films participate in an attack upon such an ideology. First, the *Matrix*, like *Frankenstein*, is an apparently materialist text. Neither text offers an ex-nihilo God figure who manipulates the system. Human ingenuity and invention are responsible for every dark element within the film: the Matrix, the machines and programs, and Zion all first come into existence through humanity's, not divinity's, intervention. Those who would point to either Neo or Trinity's return from death as support for a spiritualist reading should remember that both deaths, and thus rebirths, happen within the digital dream world of the Matrix. As Morpheus sets up in the first film, people die in the Matrix because the mind believes it, and the body cannot live without the mind. In both cases the human mind overcomes, or denies, the death experience. Secondly, both texts draw out the inconsistencies at the heart of Christian theology by highlighting the irony inherent in advocating a perfect creator who cannot produce anything but a flawed creation. As Gilbert and Gubar argue in relation to *Frankenstein*, so too does the *Matrix* "take the male cultural myth of *Paradise Lost* at its full value—on its own terms, including all the analogies and parallels it implies—*and rewrite it so as to clarify its meaning*."[49]

In "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve", Gilbert and Gubar argue that Victor and his monster each enact at different times the roles of God, Satan, Adam, Eve, and Sin. Making visual such role-playing, many of the films' characters are at different times hero and victim, problem and solution, male and female. The Architect doubles as both God and Adam. He is the creator of the system, but he was himself, as part of the machine world, first created by human beings. Like Victor's monster, Neo simultaneously enacts the roles of Adam, Satan, and Christ figure in his quest to

[49]Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, 220.

understand the Law of the Father. It is through Neo that Zion lives or dies, through Neo that the world of the Matrix is apocalyptically reborn. He is Christ-figure as well as flawed Adam to the god-like Architect who punishes his creations for his own frustration with the system. So too is Neo an ambitious Satan figure who fights the oppressive nature of his supreme ruler. Just as Gilbert and Gubar argue in reference to *Frankenstein*, the *Matrix* demonstrates the fluidity between these allegedly distinct Miltonic characters. Further, the *Matrix* also re-writes elements of Milton's work in order to clarify its philosophical ramifications. For instance, Agent Smith's description of the original Matrix poignantly parallels the exile from Eden:

> Did you know that the first Matrix was designed to be a perfect human world? Where none suffered, where everyone would be happy. It was a disaster. No one would accept the program; entire crops were lost. Some believed that we lacked the programming language to describe your perfect world. But I believe, that as a species, human beings define their reality though misery and suffering. Which is why the Matrix was redesigned to *this*, the peak of your civilization.[50]

Echoing Milton's premise that human choice is responsible for loss, Smith's explanation shifts the emphasis form a single incident of choice to a larger concept of choice. According to the premise of the film, human beings are directly responsible for creating and enduring their own ideologies. Accordingly, if choice is the fundamental problem, then it is the continual acceptance of an ideology, a program, of "misery and suffering" that is the truly damning choice.

Perhaps most compellingly, feminine frailty and the Eve-like fall are also re-enacted and, thereby, called into question throughout the films. As Persephone's name denotes, her marriage

[50] Wachowski brothers, *The Matrix.*.

represents the relationship of power between captor and prisoner. The unwilling wife of Hades, Persephone symbolizes both the female subjugation and subversion generated by such violent gender relations. The Merovingian's sensuous and voluptuous bride, motivated by the feminine-coded emotion of jealousy, betrays him by delivering the Key-Maker to his enemies:

> Merovingian: Oh God, my God, Persephone how could you do this, you betrayed me! Nom de Dieu de putain de bordel de saloperie de couille de merde! [Trans: Name of God of whore of brothel of filth of testicle of shit]
>
> Persephone: Cause and effect, my love.
>
> Merovingian: Cause? There is no cause for this, what cause?
>
> Persephone: What cause? How about the lipstick you're still wearing?
>
> Merovingian: Lipstick? Lipstick? What craziness you are talking about woman, there is no lipstick.
>
> Persephone: She wasn't kissing your face, my love.
>
> Merovingian: *Ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai woman*, this is nothing, c'est rien, c'est rien du tout. [Trans: This is nothing, this is nothing at all] It's a game. It is only a game.
>
> Persephone: So is this. Have fun.[51]

Guided by emotion rather than reason, Persephone, like Eve, makes a choice that compromises her husband's position. Rather than appearing weak, however, her actions testify to her power as an equal partner capable of, and responsible for, acting in her own self-interest. As an Eve figure, she is empowered rather than villanized, offering an alternative reading of *Paradise Lost*'s central conflict: "It is Eve, after all, who languishes helpless and alone, while Adam converses with superior beings, and it is

[51] Wachowski brothers, *The Matrix Reloaded*.

Eve in whom the Satanically bitter gall of envy rises, causing her to eat the apple in the hope of adding 'what wants/ In Female Sex.'"[52]

Equally compelled by intuition and emotion, Trinity makes a choice that also compromises her male partner's position. Refusing to share his prophetic dream with Trinity, Neo asks her to swear that she will not enter the Matrix during his dangerous journey to the source. Kept ignorant of important information, she, like Eve, acquiesces to her partner's direction. Finding that a Zion crew has fallen during their mission and that Neo is walking into certain death, Trinity breaks her vow, declaring, "I will not stand here and do nothing. I will not wait here to watch them die."[53] Neo's dream that opened the film now comes to fruition as Trinity literally falls. The architect shows Neo images of Trinity's bloody, falling form and forces Neo to choose between Trinity's life and the survival of Zion. According to the Architect's deal, the human race will ultimately fall because Trinity fell. Yet this text allows the Eve figure to defend the obvious necessity of her actions within an impossible situation as Trinity cries, "Neo, I had to." As the Architect emphasizes and as Milton advocates, "the problem is choice," or more precisely the lack of any "real" choice for Eve. She must fall so that God may show his mercy. Trinity must fall so that the Oracle's "dangerous game" can be played out to its thrilling end. Trinity's fall "enacts…the story of Eve's discovery not that she must fall but that, having been created female, she *is* fallen, femaleness and fallenness being essentially synonymous."[54] Throughout the trilogy, gender and its traditional ideological associations remain central to a larger investigation of human experience. Unlike more faithful adaptations of *Frankenstein*, the *Matrix* maintains ambiguity and seeks to unsettle rather than merely entertain.

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[52] Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, 239.
[53] Wachowski brothers, *The Matrix Reloaded*.
[54] Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, 234.

Irwin Williams declares in his introduction to *The Matrix and Philosophy*: "As culture critic Slavoj Žižek suggests, *The Matrix* is a philosopher's Rorschach inkblot test. Philosophers see their favored philosophy in it: existentialism, Marxism, feminism, Buddhism, nihilism, postmodernism. Name your philosophical *ism* and you can find it in *The Matrix*."[55] This chapter did not set out to define or defend one reading of the *Matrix* to the exclusion of the dozens of other readings or approaches posited by scholars. The *Matrix* is certainly so much more than simply an adaptation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Yet the eerie parallels require investigation and support the existence of the spirit of Shelley's work within the films. Whether or not the Wachowski brothers consciously imbued their text with these images and issues, I do not find it strange that such a philosophically driven project would ultimately use Shelley's work as the thematic vehicle in which to deliver powerful social critique. *Frankenstein*'s mythic and largely unconscious appeal in addition to the language offered by Gothic discourse seems an intuitive choice for discussing religious, technological, and ideological questions. It's interesting to note, in fact, that *Frankenstein* is one of the few sources the Wachowski brothers do not overtly reference. As I asserted in the introduction, one of the key elements in postmodern adaptations, and specifically the works I've categorized as adaptive criticism, is a self-reflexive tone that highlights its acknowledgement of previous source material as well as its own re-inventiveness. *The Matrix* trilogy does, in fact, make this move, but the source material it highlights and re-invents is Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations*, Plato's "Allegory of the cave," and Descarte's dream argument, among many others. But these self-reflective references and re-inventions are, as I have argued here, all wrapped inside the larger *Frankenstein* myth and its attendant imagery. Thus, the power of Shelley's

[55] William Irwin ed., *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 1.

tale and our modern cultural impulse to adapt and re-adapt it, even as we no longer consciously register the process of its adaptation, point precisely to the importance of re-examining our academic concept of adaptation. The *Matrix* trilogy is an important text for *Frankenstein* scholars because it allows subjective and thematic multiplicity as well as brings together the various and volatile themes which no previous adaptation has yet been able to stably accommodate. Re-inventing, rather than strictly adapting, Shelley's Gothic tale in all its rich complexity, the *Matrix* trilogy provides new and interesting ways to re-examine *Frankenstein* and its mythic appeal.

CONCLUSION

> "*The Hours*, which was the working title of *Mrs. Dalloway*, has three authors: Woolf, Cunningham, and the British playwright-cum-filmmaker David Hare… That is to say, this picture has no one author and therefore no single voice. Let's call it adaptation *à la mode*, art by committee, or an instance of the aesthetics of incest."
>
> --Bert Cardullo[1]

Perhaps no other text highlights more succinctly or calls out more powerfully for a shift in adaptation scholarship than *The Hours.* I set out in this thesis to respond to the sophisticated and complex trends I see developing in the genre of adaptation, and any examination of this junction between early feminist writings and contemporary media would be incomplete, it seems to me, without the inclusion of Virginia Woolf. *The Hours* seems an appropriate place to end this examination since this text, like *Bridget Jones's Diary*, represents unprecedented artistic collaboration or "the aesthetics of incest" as Cardullo terms it. Unquestionably, *The Hours* stands at a unique textual intersection mediating, as it does, multiple time frames, multiple texts, and multiple authors. This intersection presents interesting challenges to an academic approach since this film stands in relation to no single previous text, encapsulating Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, biographical elements of the author's life, Michael Cunningham's novel, and David Hare's script, all within Stephen Daldry's larger cinematic vision. *The Hours* exemplifies the "art by committee" spirit that defines adaptive criticism.

I argued in my introduction that this new trend in adaptation, which I have termed adaptive criticism, is marked by self-reflexiveness. These works display a postmodern sense of awareness and tend to highlight, to one degree or another, their own position as adaptations. Unlike classic adaptations, adaptive criticisms highlight the dynamic relationship that exists between reader and text by enacting both sides of the process; they are both a reading of a

[1] Bert Cardullo, "Art and Matter," *Hudson Review*, Winter2004, Vol. 56 Issue 4, 669.

previous text as well as a unique text themselves. Directors, scriptwriters and novel writers are more clearly imprinting their presence upon their adaptations by calling attention to the collaborative process between themselves and the original author. Traditional adaptations, it seems to me, do not openly acknowledge that directors and scriptwriters are first readers of a previous text and then writers of a subsequent text. Instead, these classic adaptations seem to imply that meaning resides solely within the original, physical text and thus it can be exported to screen. Scholars then inadvertently validate this implication by praising or condemning adaptations for their fidelity, or lack of fidelity, to the original text. As I argued in chapter one, Helen Fielding's novel and Sharon Maguire's film both overtly and comically call attention to their mutual collaboration with Andrew Davies and Jane Austen. Together these three artists make clear their position as readers of Austen's text and creative collaborators on their own texts. The fluidity between reader and writer is maintained and explored within these types of adaptations. To put the case another way, traditional adaptations work much like the wizard in the *The Wizard of Oz*. They ask audiences to pay no real attention to the man behind the curtain; they maintain an illusion of removed authority. Adaptive criticism, on the other hand, rips away the curtain and produces for us the engineer of the images so that we may question his or her authority, artistry, scholarship, and production of interpretive meaning.

The Hours pulls aside the curtain to expose the complexity of positioning author and reader in the textual process. By placing her within the narrative frame, Woolf is both author and character within Daldry's film. Played by Nicole Kidman, Virginia Woolf simultaneously lives her story, writes her story, and shapes her subsequent readers. Paralleling Woolf's position, Richard is also both author and character: the burdensome child of 50s housewife Laura Brown and then prize-winning novelist in Clarissa Vaughn's story. In a self-reflexive move, Louis,

Richard's ex-lover, quips, "fiction is meant to do more than change names, isn't it?"[2] Louis's line works on a number of levels to call attention to the collaboration of authorship. He is directly referencing Richard's award-winning novel, which makes pseudo-fiction of his real life story. And yet this quip can also be aimed at Michael Cunningham, David Hare, and both their separate and mutual collaborations with Virginia Woolf as each writer transports an existing story into different fictional domains. Using both Woolf and Richard as authorial figures within this adaptation of *Mrs. Dalloway* is interesting because by consistently invoking the author within the text, *The Hours* asks us to re-consider the dynamic relationship between writer, text, and reader, and how this relationship is responsible for the production of meaning.

The original text no longer stands apart as a separate entity entirely responsible for the production of its own meaning. Rather, the plot of *Mrs. Dalloway* interacts powerfully and variously with each reader and each writer. Also, taken together, the three main characters map another little regarded aspect of the textual process: how a story evolves from paper to publication. Woolf represents the artist, Laura Brown the intended reader, and Clarissa Vaughn the editor who invisibly mediates between the two. Exemplifying the postmodern complexities of adaptive criticism, *The Hours* reminds us that reading, or actively producing meaning, is anything but a simple or static process.

I have also argued that adaptive criticism differs from previous adaptive approaches by blurring temporal boundaries and clearly foregrounding social and cultural trajectories. Simultaneously referencing separate historical eras and the cultural issues they each share, adaptive criticism allows us to track the evolution of large cultural movements such as feminism. Moving rapidly as it does between early 1920s London, 1950s Los Angeles, and 1990s New York City, *The Hours* brilliantly connects the lives and problems of three women separated by

[2] Steven Daldry (director), *The Hours*. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2003.

decades. Speaking to the challenge of translating Cunningham's novel to cinematic format, Hare asserts, "I found my own way of mixing the stories up and making new connections. I knew we could replicate the pleasure the book gives—that of slowly understanding the way in which the three stories fit together."[3] Marketing material for *The Hours* insisted that in this film "each woman is joined to the other like links in a chain, unaware that the power of a single great work of literature is irrevocably altering their lives."[4] Certainly, Woolf's novel is the over-arching theme directly connecting these women, but I would suggest that there is something more, something outside the novel, which unites them.

Before *Mrs. Dalloway* is formally introduced into the plot, the film's first several shots intimately connect these women. We see each woman waking to the chimes and buzz of clocks, rising despondently from bed, washing their faces and arranging their hair as they prepare for the day ahead. Feminine rituals, daily demands, and emotional dissatisfaction bond these women dispersed across the twentieth century. The social and gender-driven expectations that the novel addresses, rather than simply the novel itself, govern the powerful trajectory connecting these women. *The Hours* highlights not only the fact that novels remain continually relevant, but more importantly *why* they remain relevant. The film offers scholars a single textual site from which to re-investigate the problems central not only to Woolf's text, but to the larger and more universal problems with which feminism and feminist scholarship are concerned. Giving the most chilling line of the film to Virginia Woolf, this film openly declares itself an examination of the tragedies women face when they "live a life [they] have no intention of living."[5]

Another key element that I argue sets adaptive criticism apart from traditional adaptation is its interactive relationship with academic scholarship. As I demonstrated during my discussion

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[3] Paramount Pictures, *The Hours* Production Notes, 2003. <www.movieweb.com>
[4] Paramount Pictures, *The Hours* Production Notes
[5] Daldry, *The Hours*.

of Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* and Davies's, Fielding's and Maguire's *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, postmodern scholarship is responsible, at least in part, for breaking down the traditional barriers between high and low culture, between academic and non-academic spheres. Theories that once circulated mainly within the academy are now seeping outside the academic walls and becoming mainstreamed into popular culture. Combining post-colonial theory with recent biographical work on Austen, Rozema imbues *Mansfield Park* with a sharp academic edge. Likewise, Cunningham and Hare invoke elements of feminist scholarship and biography in their adaptation of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Specifically, Cunningham's adaptive novel relies heavily on Hermione Lee's groundbreaking biography of Woolf. Thus, recent scholarship investigating Woolf's role as a progressive feminist, her battle with insanity, and her tragic suicide now moves into the larger popular domain through this film and its reliance on such material. Acting as the intermediary that adaptation is, *The Hours* provides new material to both pop culture audiences and academic audiences alike. As Daldry hoped, "if you knew nothing about Mrs. Dalloway, if you knew nothing about Virginia Woolf, …it would not make one iota of difference in your enjoyment and appreciation of this film. But people who *have* read *Mrs. Dalloway* know that it's a treasure map, and they will…find as much joy as we did in the exploration."[6] Adaptation at its best, at its smartest and most sophisticated, can do a great deal more than entertain; it can inspire, challenge, and deliver fresh material to various communities of readers.

Adaptive criticism delivers interactive sites that can open up new investigations into classic texts as well as contemporary culture. By embracing the "art by committee" or the "aesthetics of incest" that Cardullo observes, adaptive criticism encourages what David Hare

[6] Paramount Pictures, *The Hours* Production Notes

refers to as "a tradition of writers handing on subject matter, one to another."[7] Rather than closing interpretative and academic engagement with a text, adaptive criticism demonstrates that scholars, writers, and artists can collaborate to continually re-investigate classic texts and their cultural import. In order to incorporate these collaborative voices and appropriately grapple with the material they offer us, we need to move beyond the standard adaptation approaches that rely on textual fidelity; or perhaps we need only re-define what textual fidelity means. As *Bridget Jones's Diary, Sex and the City, The Matrix* and *The Hours* attest, adaptations can be "loyal" to a text in a larger and more relevant sense, even as they consciously or unconsciously break with convention and re-write plots and dialogue. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf wrote, "For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice."[8] Adaptive Criticism responds to Woolf's declaration by denying the myth of "solitary births" in favor of acknowledging and exploring the "many years of thinking in common" and "the body of people" that culminate in an adaptation's "single voice."

[7] Paramount Pictures, *The Hours* Production Notes
[8] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1957, 65.

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