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Passive Spectacles and Resilient Heroines: Examining the Female Gaze in Cinematic Adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *Little Women*

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**Passive Spectacles and Resilient Heroines:
Examining the Female Gaze in Cinematic Adaptations of
The Scarlet Letter, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *Little Women***

by

Megan E. Cassidy

**A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York
College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

May 1, 2006

Passive Spectacles and Resilient Heroines:
Examining the Female Gaze in Cinematic Adaptations of
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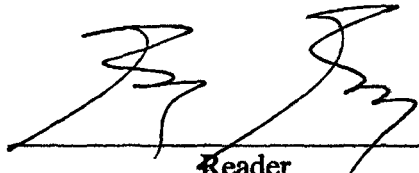
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Abstract

In her 1975 article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey writes, "Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (60). She argues that in film, this patriarchal language produces images of women who are displayed for the erotic enjoyment of male spectators, playing out male subconscious erotic fantasies on screen.

Using Mulvey's articles as a theoretical framework, I look for evidence of the active female gaze in the cinematic adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter* written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1850, *The Last of the Mohicans* written by James Fenimore Cooper in 1826 and *Little Women* written by Louisa May Alcott in 1868. For each chapter of my thesis, I examine a pair of adaptations beginning with the 1934 and 1995 versions of *The Scarlet Letter*, followed by the 1936 and 1992 versions of *The Last of the Mohicans*, and concluding with the 1933 and 1994 versions of *Little Women*.

Each of the earlier films from the 1930s is encoded in this patriarchal structure to some degree. Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" was published in 1975. While her theories on patriarchal encryption can be seen in the films from the 1930s, advances in areas such as equal rights, political correctness, and affirmative action have influenced the filmmakers of the later 1990s films. Due to the changes in the political atmosphere, each of the three films from the 1990s demonstrate a greater awareness of the female audience and struggle to allow women to have a strong gaze.

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Introduction: Visual Pleasure and the Female Spectator

Part of the subconscious draw of cinema is that films allow spectators to become voyeurs. For two hours in a theater, spectators sit virtually alone in the dark and are drawn into a private world where their own secret erotic fantasies are revealed through the lives of characters on screen. The concept of voyeurism predates the development of cinema. Sigmund Freud explained that pleasure is associated with looking. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* he wrote that as man evolved, he began to rely almost solely on visual stimuli to become sexually aroused (*Civilization* 87). Freud developed the term “scopophilia” to identify this pleasure through looking. He said that in children, scopophilia could lead to the development of a castration complex; in adults, the pleasure of looking could rise above actual sexual gratification and lead to voyeurism. Voyeurism is directly connected to sexual desire and power over the object being viewed. The voyeur wants to look at and control the object more than he desires to have actual sexual contact with it (*Freud Reader* 251, 270-1).

Laura Mulvey applied Freud’s model of voyeurism to film studies because cinema demonstrates physically the “pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have molded him” (“Visual” 58). Mulvey uses Freud’s psychoanalytical theories to demonstrate the subconscious way voyeuristic desire had been incorporated into cinema through passive depictions of women in film (“Visual” 58-9). In her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey argues that in film, women are passive material controlled by the active gaze of voyeuristic men. She identifies three different types

of voyeurism that occur in film: the camera recording events, the audience who view the final product, and the characters who interact with each other. She also argues that films pretend that there are no cameras or audience members; only stories. Therefore, audience members are required to become voyeurs. Mulvey writes, "Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into language of the dominant patriarchal order" ("Visual" 60). She believes that because Hollywood is an industry dominated by men, spectators are required to watch passive images of women and view this illusion through an active male gaze. This type of spectatorship has been sustained throughout cinematic history because male audience members have gained erotic satisfaction by viewing and controlling the submissive and sexually attractive women depicted on screen.

Mulvey further explores the issue of the female spectator in her essay, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.'" Mulvey argues that traditionally in movies which feature women, such as films of the melodramatic genre, female protagonists are conflicted because they shift between feminine passivity and masculine activity. She adds that when viewing films featuring male protagonists, female spectators are either caught up in the film and unable to break free from the language of the patriarchy, or they are so far removed from the patriarchy that they are unable to find pleasure in viewing the film ("Afterthoughts" 122, 124). Mulvey writes that the language of the cinema is still based in the patriarchy and therefore female protagonists are unable to achieve stable identities unless they are defined as the extremely passive binary opposites of male heroes. She

writes that female protagonists shift neurotically between masculinity and femininity while trying to achieve a stable identity so that eventually, they are forced to choose “The correct road, *femininity*, leads to increasing repression of ‘the active’ ” (Afterthoughts 124). Therefore while women are able to be viewers of film, their spectatorship is passive and they are unable to have the same type of active control that male spectators possess. To have an active gaze, women in the audience would need to be able to take pleasure in and control the images on screen. Optimally, this gaze would not function at the expense of the active male gaze, but would exist beside it.

Using Mulvey’s articles as a theoretical framework, I will be look for evidence of the active female gaze in the cinematic adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter* written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1850, *The Last of the Mohicans* written by James Fenimore Cooper in 1826 and *Little Women* written by Louisa May Alcott in 1868. For each chapter of my thesis, I will examine a pair of adaptations beginning with the 1934 and 1995 versions of *The Scarlet Letter*, followed by the 1936 and 1992 versions of *The Last of the Mohicans*, and concluding with the 1933 and 1994 versions of *Little Women*.

The novels were written before the first wave of the feminist movement. Their early adaptations were produced shortly after the end of feminism’s first wave and their later adaptations were produced after feminism’s second wave. These historical movements provide a baseline for studying the development of the female gaze in film. When *The Last of the Mohicans* was published in 1826, the women’s

movement consisted of loosely organized local groups and focused primarily on women's suffrage and anti-slavery (Le Gates 197). By the time *The Scarlet Letter* was published in 1850, those small groups began to coalesce and function on a national level. These larger groups held a series of equal-rights conventions throughout the 1850s. When looking at the history of the feminist movement in the book *In Their Time*, Marlene LeGates explains that this national movement was further advanced in the years before *Little Women* was published. LeGates explains that the American Civil War gave a, "Great boost to women's activism by encouraging the formation of thousands of aid societies, a massive petition drive to abolish slavery, and postwar Reconstruction work in teaching and community welfare" (200).

In the intervening years after the three novels were published and before their 1930 cinematic adaptations appeared, the women's movement underwent drastic changes in both Europe and America. The word "feminisme" developed in France in the late 1880s and was translated into the English "feminism," which appeared in the United States around 1910 (Cott 14). Organizations such as the National Woman's Party (NWP), the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and the Congressional Union (CU) helped to solidify the first wave of feminism. By 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment, which provided voting rights to women, was added to the Constitution (Cott 53-55, 62). *Little Women* was produced in 1933 and the tone of the film reflects the strong backlash against the feminist movement which took place after the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. In her book *The Grounding*

of *Modern Feminism*, Nancy Cott explains, "Once women gained the vote and nominal entry to normal political channels, political solidarity was seen by male politicians as an ideological as well as practical threat and was magnified into sex war" (278).

By the time the heavily patriarchal version of *The Scarlet Letter* was produced in 1936, the first wave of feminism had passed. The feminist movement was considered to be over and formerly united feminist groups decentralized and broke into various sects. Influenced by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, these sects united to fight for the liberation of women as an oppressed social group (Cott 282-3, LeGates 348). During this second wave of feminism, groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) pushed for equality in the areas such as work and education. They lobbied for women's rights legislation such as Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) which was passed by Congress in 1972 (Freedman 85). Although the ERA was not ratified, other legislation such as the Women's Educational Equity Act and Equal Credit Opportunity Act helped to ensure equal opportunities for women (Freedman 85).

By the time *The Last of the Mohicans* was filmed in 1992, the feminist movement had again fragmented into various groups and sects. The percentage in the labor force had grown from 37.7 percent in 1960 to 56.8 percent in 1990 (Freedman 373). However, affirmative action practices which had assisted women to obtain jobs and gain educational advantages were heavily scrutinized during the 1990s and, "successful political campaigns overturned in higher education in several U.S. states"

(Freedman, 181). While some organizations fought to retain affirmative action laws, other groups struggled to add more gender-neutral words into the English language. During the 1990s, these movements such as these encountered an oppositional backlash against political correctness (Freedman 307). In her book *The New Victorians*, Rene Denfeld explains that in this decade, many sects of the feminist movement became more radical and promoted principles such as goddess religion, eco-feminism, and matriarchal utopianism. These ideologies did not appeal to other feminists who wanted to work for more traditional causes such as equal opportunities for women in the U.S. and other countries.

These historical events influenced the movie industry and affected the way in which women were portrayed in films. When examining each film, I analyze the way in which female characters are presented as either passive spectacles able to be controlled by the male gaze, or as active characters who empower the female gaze. Since Mulvey's original essay was published over thirty years ago, I explore whether or not the later films, being made after the second wave of feminism, are less encoded in patriarchal language which she describes. In addition, Mulvey's arguments are primarily theoretical and in both "Visual Pleasure" and "Afterthoughts," she uses a hypothetical audience comprised of heterosexual and homogeneous men and women. Therefore, while her analysis of the effects of cinematic patriarchal encryption on viewers may apply to some audience members, it does not apply to all. This is to say that some women may take pleasure in films which, according to Mulvey, suppress the female gaze. This demonstrates that Mulvey's theories are in no way all-

encompassing. Therefore, although I use Mulvey's articles as a theoretical framework, and at times refer to the "male audience" or "female viewer," I am only referring to these audience members as Mulvey understands them and do not presume to account for how every audience member may or may not feel.

Each of the earlier films from the 1930s is encoded in this patriarchal structure to some degree. My thesis begins with *The Scarlet Letter* because the novel's early adaptation presents female characters most repressed by the patriarchal structure; these women are weak victims in need of the heroics of their stronger male counterparts. A similar dynamic occurs in *The Last of the Mohicans*. However in that adaptation, one of the Munro sisters is given a small amount of agency and strength and in this way, the film allows for a stronger female gaze than does *The Scarlet Letter*. The early adaptation of *Little Women* was written by a male-female team and at first portrays strong female characters, but falters in its second half as those characters grow into adult women. However, its female gaze is nevertheless more empowering than either *The Scarlet Letter* or *The Last of the Mohicans*. In this way, neither earlier version of *The Last of the Mohicans* nor *The Scarlet Letter* works the way Mulvey suggests. They do not merely carry the female viewer by the "scruff of the text" ("Afterthoughts" 122). Instead, they allow women to identify with central characters, maintain a stronger gaze, and have viewing pleasure.

Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" was published in 1975 and her follow-up essay "Afterthoughts" was published in 1981. While her theories on patriarchal encryption can be seen in the films from the 1930s, the

filmmakers of the later 1990s films are a part of a culture influenced by feminist advances in areas such as equal rights, political correctness, and affirmative action. Due to the changes in the political atmosphere, each of the three films from the 1990s demonstrate a greater awareness of the female audience and struggle to allow women to have a strong gaze. *The Scarlet Letter* is the least successful in trying to support this gaze. It flounders by trying to display passive female characters as sexual objects while simultaneously using politically correct feminist language. Like its earlier predecessor, the later version of *The Last of the Mohicans* allows some female characters to gain strength and control; however, this empowerment often occurs at the expense of other women in the movie. I close with the later version of *Little Women* because this film was written and directed by women and supports a strong female gaze.

“Speak Woman! Speak!” Hester Prynne as Silenced Spectacle

The original *Scarlet Letter*, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1850, is centered on the repercussions of an adulterous affair between Hester Prynne and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. The novel opens after Hester has given birth to Pearl and is being punished by the Puritan magistrates as a result of her daughter's illegitimacy. The narrative focuses on Hester's personal growth after her confession and her lover's corresponding internal withdrawal which is the result of his refusal to confess. The 1934 adaptation uses Hawthorne's original narrative as its main plot, but also adds comic scenes not in the original novel in order to diffuse the film's sexual tension. The second film also strays from Hawthorne's narrative and uses the novel only as a template to make a statement about the whole of Puritan society and culture.

At first glance it seems as if the 1934 and 1995 adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter* have little in common. Mulvey explains that films display images crafted for the pleasure of male audience members because the “determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (“Visual” 62). Mulvey also writes that since many films have a determining male gaze, they are encoded in the language of the patriarchy. The early adaptation of Hawthorne's novel follows this pattern and is heavily immersed in the patriarchy and therefore plays mainly to a male audience, while the later adaptation attempts to satisfy active female spectators. However, even though the later film shows an awareness of the female gaze through the use of empowering and politically correct language, it also allows

Hester to be silenced and she is put on display even more so than in the earlier adaptation.

The 1934 version of *The Scarlet Letter* was directed by Robert G. Vignola and stars Colleen Moore as Hester Prynne, Hardie Albright as Arthur Dimmesdale, and Henry Walthall as Roger Chillingworth. This early adaptation features Hester, Chillingworth, and Dimmesdale in a melodramatic storyline which closely follows the original text of Hawthorne's novel. In her essay "Film Bodies," Linda Williams argues that melodrama presumes the gaze of a passive female audience and often becomes a:

Subgenre of sadomasochistic pornography, with its suspension of pleasure over the course of prolonged sessions of dramatic suffering [...] the classic melodramatic scenario of the passive and innocent female victim suffering at the hands of a leering villain (274-5).

The 1934 version of *The Scarlet Letter* is a melodrama which presents Hester as a female protagonist who is given a small amount of power. However, passivity is imposed on the female spectator forced to have a passive gaze when Hester suffers melodramatically throughout each scene¹.

¹ Another feature of the film that deflects the viewer's eye from Hester's sexuality are comic vignettes spliced in between scenes of main plot which present a separate storyline featuring the comic misadventures of Mistress Abigail, Master Bartholomew, and Master Sampson. The men's interactions with Mistress Abigail parody the actions of the main characters. These additional comedic scenes displace the film's sexual tension and may have been inserted into the film due to changes in cinematic censorship. The movie was made only three years after the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) instituted a moral code that strictly censored sexuality in film. The 1930 code prohibited scenes of passion, excessive kissing or petting, seduction and adultery, except that which was inferred for plot reasons (Miller 295-6). Therefore, the comic foibles of Bartholomew and Sampson may have been added to undercut the melodrama and sexuality suggested by the main storyline.

In both films, the threat of Hester's sexuality is constantly deflected onto different characters. In the earlier film, Hester's sexual substitute is her daughter Pearl, whose innocence poses no threat to the patriarchy. In the later film, the silent slave Mituba plays a mainly passive role, especially when the male gaze is drawn to her silent sexuality; in this way, she is able to act as Hester's sexual surrogate. Sexual substitution in both films gives female spectators the message that their sexuality is evil, inadequate, and unable to be fully expressed. These substitutions also reinforce the idea of Hester's passive nature, which is contrasted with the active nature of Dimmesdale, whose sexuality is never questioned or displaced.

The 1995 version of *The Scarlet Letter* also struggles to maintain an active female gaze. In her "Afterthoughts" article, Mulvey asserts that films supposedly intended for a female audience with a female protagonist often have difficulties creating a stable spectatorship (122-3). An active female gaze would act similarly to an active male gaze and allow women watching the film to take pleasure in and control the images on screen. The later version of *The Scarlet Letter* attempts to pleasure a female spectatorship, but often regresses and instead, gratifies an active male audience.

This later adaptation was directed by Roland Joffe and stars Demi Moore as Hester, Gary Oldman as Dimmesdale, and Robert Duvall as Chillingworth. The first hour of the film is prologue to Hawthorne's novel and shows Hester and Dimmesdale meeting and falling in love. During this section of the film, many historical events are blended together in an attempt to present the audience with a detailed picture of

Puritan life during the 1600s. In this way, the filmmakers are able to portray Hester's life as a universal experience applicable to all Puritan women. The second hour of the film also greatly changes the original text and involves an altered love triangle between Hester, her lover, and her husband. In addition, the film continues in its attempt to depict all areas of Puritan life; there are several scenes involving a witchcraft trial and tension between the Puritans and Native Americans which results in a massacre of the town.

The film also endeavors to be a feminist text which allows female spectators to have an active gaze. For example, an unseen adult Pearl narrates the film and is placed in the film as a voice of active womanhood. However, similar to Mulvey's description of female protagonists in her article "Afterthoughts," Hester is unable to establish a unified identity and instead, alternates between an active and passive persona. For example, Hester makes it a point to speak her mind, especially during the film's witchcraft trial. However, as Hester attempts to break free from Puritan conventions, the filmmakers re-enfold her into the patriarchal structure by stressing her sexuality and placing large emphasis on what Mary Ann Doane terms "to-be-looked-at-ness" (71). This dichotomy causes a breach between the dialogue and the visual narrative of the film because while Hester's words characterize her as a strong-willed feminist, the *mis en scene* of each scene is crafted for an active male gaze.

The Scarlet Letter 1934

In Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, the opening chapters "The Marketplace" and "The Recognition" are ripe for the gaze of an audience. As Hawthorne slowly draws his audience into the life of Hester Prynne, readers are almost invited to become voyeurs. Readers also gaze at Hester through the eyes of other characters in the novel as the adulteress stands in front of the townspeople on the scaffold. Hawthorne writes that, "The scene was not without a mixture of awe, such as must always invest the spectacle of guile and shame in a fellow creature" (56). He describes Hester as looking somewhat like "The image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent" (56). This description pulls the gaze toward an angelic woman who is put on display in front of the entire town.

The film adds to Hawthorne's novel by including a few vignettes prior to the scaffold scene. The movie opens with a foreword which states that Puritanical punishments may seem harsh to a modern audience, but they were necessary to the moral foundation of America.² In the opening scene, an active male gaze is presumed. A letter appears on screen stating that Mistress Faith Bartle is being punished for being a gossip. The hapless Goody Bartle is shown, standing on a platform, and wearing a cleft stick which pries open her mouth and holds her tongue

² This foreword may be related to the newly instituted MPPDA morality code which could seem harsh, but somewhat necessary to filmmakers of the period who had begun to self regulate the film industry. The fact that a woman is forced to be silent in the opening scene furthers this argument because much of the MPPDA code specifically guarded against female sexuality. For more information regarding the censorship code, see Frank Miller's *Censored Hollywood: Sex, Sin, and Violence on Screen*.

in place. Two trappers from town pass and laugh at her as she attempts to chide them. This scene follows the forward and suggests that women are punished, held up to ridicule, and forced to be silent for the betterment of the community. Brief scenes of male society follow the opening. The audience sees men working in fields while the women stand in the marketplace and gossip. Then, the film almost simultaneously introduces both the leering villain Chillingworth and the comic relief of Masters Bartholomew and Sampson.

The *mis en scene* of the scaffold episode is crafted to resemble the details of Hawthorne's novel. The scaffold sits in the center of the marketplace and the townspeople stand below the scaffold, while Dimmesdale and the magistrates sit in a balcony above it. Everything is carefully assembled so that Hester will become the main point of focus in the scene; she will be gazed up at by the townspeople and will be gazed down upon by the ministers. The informal procession of the novel becomes formal and Hester is lead out of her prison by not only a jailor, but two drummers and a host of soldiers dressed in full battle attire. As Hester is escorted to the scaffold, the crowd parts before her so that the audience's gaze is drawn to her and the child in her arms.

Hester is made all the more distinctive because of the director's choice in casting. The crowd surrounding Hester is comprised of men and women, but the camera focuses close-up shots only on a select group of older women. In comparison to Colleen Moore who plays Hester, the Puritan women are old, wrinkled, gray haired, dour matrons. These older women wear makeup underneath their eyes and in

the creases above their brows and around their mouths to further emphasize their advanced ages and disagreeable natures. Spotlighting is focused on Moore who looks virtuous and glowing with her slim figure, dark hair, and smooth white skin. The contrast between Moore and the other women allows the male audience to gaze at Hester more intently. The spectacle is heightened because unlike the other Puritan women, Moore wears makeup to enhance the beauty of her features. She wears lipstick to make her lips form the bow shape that was fashionable at that time. Moore also wears light eye shadow and either false eyelashes or heavy mascara to draw attention to her eyes. The infant Pearl is clothed in white and wrapped in a white blanket. The lighting shines upon Pearl glares off of the baby's white clothing and thereby throws even more light onto Hester's face.

In Hawthorne's novel, Chillingworth is described as intelligent, but perhaps a bit deformed physically. Hawthorne writes, "He was small in stature, with a furrowed visage, which, as yet could hardly be determined aged. There was a remarkable intelligence in his features" (60). Dimmesdale is described as an attractive, but sad figure. Of him, Hawthorne writes, "He was a person of very striking aspect, with a white, lofty, impending brow, large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which, unless when he forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast power of self restraint" (66). The early film version of the novel takes these careful characterizations and diminishes them into the hero/villain archetypes common to the lesser films of the early cinema

The film's Dimmesdale is distinctive amongst the other Puritan men, but takes a more active role in the scene than does Hester. He sits in the balcony with two other magistrates. The two other Puritans are older than Dimmesdale and as wrinkled, gray and sour looking as the matrons below. Dimmesdale also seems to wear stage makeup to enhance his mouth. A light also shines directly onto his face as he speaks to Hester. Unlike the older Puritan men beside him, Dimmesdale is muscular, slender, and wears less formal garments than the other uniformed ministers. This portrait of a young lover is contrasted with Chillingworth. The focus of the camera cuts from Dimmesdale, to Hester, to Chillingworth and back to Hester as if to reinforce her love of the one man, and her hatred, or fear, of the other. Chillingworth is dressed in ragged skins and animal furs. In this scene, he carries a long tree branch as a staff, and stands next to a similarly dressed, though not as rugged, Native American man. His long beard is gray and straggly and his stage makeup, like the matrons of the village, enhances his age and dour disposition. His eyebrows are shaded in to look darker, the lines in his face are pronounced, his cheeks are shaded to look gaunt, and eye shadow is used to make the bags under his eyes more pronounced.

In her article, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures," Gaylyn Studlar argues that the use of the simultaneous use of a male movie villain and contrasting hero allows for a masochistic and voyeuristic male gaze upon the film. She writes that men watching a film in which a woman is traumatized by a villain take a perverse pleasure in the scene because they can identify with the villain. At the same time,

these male viewers can identify with the voyeuristic gaze of the hero of the story who saves and wins the girl (Studlar 213). In this version of *The Scarlet Letter*, male viewers are able to take masochistic pleasure in the suffering of Hester through Chillingworth. At the same time, they can identify with the heroic and kinder gaze of Dimmesdale. Hester is set up to be the fetishized spectacle of the scene and in this way, the filmmakers allow male spectators to have an active gaze.

The female gaze is suppressed not only through the camerawork, but through the dialogue as well. In Hawthorne's novel, women in the marketplace comment on the justice of Hester's punishment. Some oppose the scarlet letter, believing the letter is too ornate for a Puritan woman, while one young woman comments that as Hester stitched the letter, she felt the pain of it in her heart (54). In the film, the matrons of the town begin to gossip and Mistress Abigail says that because the letter on Hester's breast can always be covered up, "It would be better if they put the hot brand of the iron on her forehead; that she could not hide." Instead of another woman objecting, it is Master Bartholomew who replies, "Let her cover the mark as she will. The pain of it will always be in her heart." During the discussion, the three matrons stand in front of Bartholomew and he towers over them. His words sound kind and noble in the midst of petty female gossip. It is as if he is the divine patriarchal figure who will set these wayward women on the right path.

Although she is the protagonist of the film, Hester becomes almost completely submissive while on the scaffold. Instead of looking directly up at Dimmesdale, she tilts her head downward and raises her eyes in a demonstration of

submission to him. Her dialogue also suppresses the female gaze. As Bruce Daniels notes in "Hollywood's Hester Prynne":

Hester's dialogue may set a record for the number of "no's" said in any movie. When she stood on the scaffold and Dimmesdale demanded that she reveal the name of her lover: "no," she replied with a slow shake of her head. The crowd roared "speak." She did: "no, no, no, never" (7).

As Hester repeatedly speaks these negatives, Dimmesdale takes an active lead in the film. He gives an extended speech on the reasons that Hester should reveal the name of her lover while Hester looks at him adoringly. Chillingworth invokes the crowd to yell at her when he roars, "Speak woman! Speak!" In this case, all that Hester can do is look down at him, tremble, clutch Pearl to her chest and say "no" over and over again. Only then, after being berated by the gaze of Chillingworth, her lover, and the crowd does Hester give an abbreviated version of her speech in the original novel. In the film, she submissively and lovingly looks to Dimmesdale and says simply, "I wish I could bear his agony, as well as mine."

Elements of melodrama described in Linda William's article "Film Bodies" include: emotional sensationalism, coincidence, and the separation of the "sexually passive 'good' girl from the sexually active 'bad' girl" (272-4). These elements combine to create a passive viewing experience for female audience members. Hester's virginal quality, her shortened speech, the coincidence of her husband arriving in town at the moment of her trial, and the actors' excessive emotional

outpourings establish the melodramatic tone of the film. Hester's agony and dramatic suffering is prolonged and emphasized in her husband's appearance at the scaffold. The filmmakers designed Chillingworth to be the movie's villain. While Hester stands looking beautiful and innocent as she tries to protect her newborn child, the older man leers at her. Chillingworth hunches over, his eyes bulge, and his neck muscles strain as he forcefully tries to control Hester with his gaze. Hester then takes on the traits of suffering and naiveté; she is all the more virginal and all the more in need of rescue. As the male spectator takes control of Hester through his active gaze, the female viewer becomes enmeshed within the trappings of melodrama and is pulled along passively by the emotional excess of the text.

The male spectator is able to take control of the gaze once again when the film progresses five years and an older Pearl is introduced. The scene opens with a group of six Puritan women washing clothing alongside the river. Five of the six are the older matrons from the scaffold scene; the sixth woman is younger and looks much like Colleen Moore. As Hester finishes her wash apart from the group at the bend in the river, the women stare at her and begin to gossip. Mistress Abigail warns the younger woman against becoming like "Yon miserable sinner." Another elderly woman wrings a garment violently as she declares, "I always said her punishment was much too light." The younger, more attractive maiden is the only voice of sympathy in the scene. She says, "She hath great skill with a needle. I would that I could employ her to make my wedding garment." After speaking these words, the maiden is chided by the older women who inform her that to do so would be an "ill

omen.” The use of the younger maiden to sympathize with Hester continues the pattern established in the scaffold scene during which the audience’s gaze was drawn to the more attractive characters and only attractive people were allowed to be sympathetic. After the women gossip, the camera shifts and focuses from the washing party to Hester and Pearl. The camera seems to take the point of view of the washing party, but at the same time, the scene is crafted to demonstrate the differences between the quiet, motherly Hester and the dour, bitter matrons who gossip about her. The use of these conflicting female archetypes deflects the blame of Hester’s punishment away from the patriarchal Puritan magistrates, and places it instead on the gossiping older women. The audience’s sympathy increases for Hester when she leaves the river with her wash. Hester goes into town to see the blacksmith and explains to the smithy Master Bartholomew that her basket needs to be repaired because she washed not only her clothes, but the clothes of an ill friend as well.

After establishing a sympathetic gaze for Hester, the camera leaves her for the moment to build the audience’s sympathy for her child as well. In the original story, Pearl is “An imp of evil, emblem and product of original sin” (93). Hawthorne explains that Pearl comprehends her difference from other children and therefore stays away from them. He writes that if children gathered around her, Pearl would, “grow positively terrible in her puny wrath, snatching up stones to fling at them, with shrill incoherent exclamations that made her mother tremble” (94). In the film version, Pearl is made less active so that the audience will sympathize with her. As

Hester visits the blacksmith, Pearl seeks out company and runs after a group of children in an attempt to play with them.

The leader of the group is Digerie Crakstone, the son of Mistress Abigail. Hester has just been socially rejected by Mistress Abigail and her friends. As a narrative complement, Pearl is now socially rejected by Digerie and his friends. Pearl marches behind the children as they play soldiers. Digerie brusquely asks, "What are you doing here?" Pearl meekly replies, "Marching" and looks down with a small pout crossing her mouth. She is told to go away, and when she offers Digerie her bouquet of wildflowers, he pushes her into the mud and begins to fling mud at her. Pearl is made into a spectacle as she sits in the mud weeping as the other children chant, "Cry baby. Cry baby." Digerie throws a hunk of mud and mistakenly hits his mother Abigail, who then blames Pearl and publicly confronts Hester. Members of the town begin to gather and as Pearl and Hester suffer ignominy, the Reverend Dimmesdale comes to their aid. Hester, who at first responded to Abigail's accusations, changes in the presence of Dimmesdale. Instead of retaliating or defending herself, Hester now stands silently in the center of the town's square as Abigail harangues her. Dimmesdale comes to his lover's rescue, pushes through the crowd and shouts, "Silence, Mistress Abigail! Silence, Mistress Abigail! You've said enough."

The melodrama of the scene to this point presumes a passive female spectatorship. Hester continues to suffer and is specifically rejected, not by Puritans' patriarchal magistrates, but by the other women in the town. Instead of one woman's struggles within societal or religious boundaries, the story in this film becomes

focused on a struggle of transgressive women against women who support the patriarchy. In "Film Bodies," Williams writes that the center of melodrama is the masochism of a woman who is forced to continuously suffer throughout a film as she awaits rescue or relief (275). In this scene, until Dimmesdale jumps into the crowd to rescue them, Hester and Pearl are forced to endure the criticism and ridicule of Mistress Abigail and the other townspeople. Not only is the female gaze suppressed by the genre of melodrama, it is also suppressed by forced silence of female characters. Hester silently suffers throughout this scene and Abigail is forced to be silent by other male characters. In the scaffold scene, Bartholomew silenced Abigail; in this scene, her voice is suppressed because of her veneration of the religious and masculine authority of the minister.

To reinforce an active male spectatorship, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale stare at Hester and Pearl and the camera takes the perspective of the two men as the mother and daughter leave the town square and return home. The scene shifts to an interior view of Hester's home and audience members are able to become voyeurs while viewing this intimate domestic scene. Pearl is shown standing on a chair, and Hester stands next to her slightly hunched over so that they seem of the same height. Pearl is in her undergarments which consist of a short sleeveless white shift and white bloomers. Her hair has been styled into ringlets, so that she looks much like Shirley Temple. Hester dresses her daughter, pouts in a childlike manner and whines that Pearl shouldn't play with other children and leave her mother all alone because her mother wants to play too. Pearl agrees to have her mother become her playmate and

when Hester lifts Pearl off of her chair, the camera allows the audience to peek at Pearl's bloomers once again. As Pearl and Hester march around the room playing soldiers, the camera allows spectators to see that Pearl's dress is not buttoned in the back so that when Pearl marches, her undergarments are still visible. Hester marches in step with Pearl and at first bends over to button her daughter's dress, but then gets lost in the game and becomes more childlike than her little girl.

It is no mistake that the filmmakers craft Pearl's image to resemble Shirley Temple. In 1933, Temple signed a studio contract with 20th Century Fox and quickly became a box office star (duCille 12). In the article, "The Shirley Temple of My Familiar," Ann DuCille describes the sexuality of Temple and the studio's use of her as a childhood temptress. She writes, "However cute and frilly, Temple's films still work to incite, excite, and satisfy a paternal white gaze, as cinema so often does [...]. She is every man's white dream, the perfect embodiment of the virgin-whore that patriarchy loves to look at (16). This model of childhood sexuality is imitated by Pearl in this adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*. Cora Sue Collins, the actress who played Pearl was one year younger than Temple and was perhaps chosen for the role because of her resemblance to the popular actress. In "Hollywood's Hester Prynne," critic Bruce Daniels notes the resemblance and says of that this scene should be "cited for copyright violation" because of its similarity to a scene from one of Temple's early films (Daniels 7).

The tableau is also interesting considering the MPPDA morality code. Both Hester and Pearl were covered with mud, yet it is Pearl who is shown being dressed

and not Hester. It is possible that in this film, Pearl represents Hester's sexuality. Hester is always depicted as a virginal and pure mother. It is Pearl who runs through the woods gathering flowers, and it is Pearl whom the audience sees in her undergarments. Perhaps because Hester's sexuality has been forcibly repressed by the filmmakers, Pearl is her sexual substitute.

Pearl is fetishized and put on display for the gaze of the male spectator to control and enjoy. According to author Jean Kilbourne, the media often encourages women to look sexy while remaining innocent little girls and at the same time, encourages little girls are to stay innocent, but look sexy. She writes, "Somehow, we are supposed to be both sexy and virginal, experienced and naïve, seductive and chaste. The disparagement of maturity is, of course, insulting and frustrating to adult women and the implication that little girls are seductive is dangerous to real children" (130). In the opening scene, Hester was virginal, yet experienced. In this scene, Hester becomes a child as she plays soldiers and marches around the room. While Hester regresses into childhood, Pearl becomes more womanly and seductive, even though she is forced to maintain her childlike innocence. The *mis en scene* is crafted so that as Pearl is dressed, she and her mother literally stand equally before the male spectator as examples of naïve, seductive, and passive examples of feminine perfection. The scene closes when an official knocks on the door and requests that Hester come before the governor and town magistrates. She looks down at her muddied clothes and softly replies, "I'll be there as soon as I change my dress." With these words, the audience is reminded that Hester is indeed a woman and not pre-

pubescent or a child and because of this, the film is not able to show Hester getting dressed. Pearl has already served as her mother's sexual substitute and therefore, the scene closes with no other mention of Hester's overt adult sexuality.

One of the most curious ways in which the film caters to the male spectator is its inclusion of comic scenes involving Master Bartholomew and Master Sampson. These comic scenes in which the two male characters take active roles offset the melodramatic scenes which feature passive female characters. Daniels argues that these scenes have a burlesque quality to them and writes, "The farcical overlay was designed to provide comic relief from the emotional angst produced by the drama. Thus, the movie would have a little something for everyone" (7). The insinuation is that the melodramatic scenes were meant for female viewers who would be drawn to the romance of the melodramatic storyline and therefore, the comic scenes were added to enhance the viewing pleasure of male spectators. However, especially in scenes of melodrama, the female gaze is passive. In effect, the scenes of comic relief add male activity to the film and therefore allow the male spectator to once again obtain an active gaze over the film's characters. In the dramatic scenes, romantic fantasies of male spectators are fulfilled on screen as Dimmesdale continuously saves the passive suffering Hester.

Both the comedic and dramatic scenes of *The Scarlet Letter* suppress the active gaze of female audience members by restraining women's ability to control the images on screen. Female spectatorship is reduced to a passive gaze during scenes of melodrama in which female characters undergo periods of prolonged suffering while

waiting for active men to save them. Hester looks into the camera, eyes tearing up and stands silently before Dimmesdale comes to her rescue. The female gaze is again suppressed when the female characters are forced into sexually stereotyped roles. Pearl becomes the virginal vixen; Hester remains naïve although she is experienced; Abigail and the other women of the town are older and dour matrons. In addition, the female gaze is suppressed during the scenes of comic relief when an active male homosocial relationship takes center stage and surpasses the main drama. Bartholomew and Sampson have an active relationship which is laced with latent homosexuality. These cinematic elements combine to alienate the female gaze and reject female spectatorship in favor of an active male gaze. The filmmakers allow men to actively take pleasure in the film as voyeurs, but female spectators are forced to become passive viewers who are distanced from the text. This is also true to some extent in the later film as well for, although the filmmakers of the 1995 adaptation seem aware of the female gaze, they continually abandon it in favor of an active male spectatorship.

The Scarlet Letter 1995

The beginning of the 1995 adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* attempts to establish a female spectatorship by turning Hester Prynne into a politically correct feminist. However, by the end of the narrative, the film fails to reach the female spectator and alienates female viewers through its brazen misuse of its star's sexuality. Demi Moore plays Hester Prynne and while she speaks the supposed propaganda of a modern day feminist, she is also made a spectacle for male audience members. In "Bad Movies/Worse History: The 1995 Unmaking of *The Scarlet Letter*," Bruce Daniels describes this conflict in the film writing, "Being annoying and chippy to virtually every male or authority figure should not be the litmus test for women's advocacy—especially when one has an aerobically-sculpted body that is shown off at every opportunity. This feisty feminist is naked *a lot*" (2). The tension created between the film's visual narrative and its dialogue supports Mulvey's argument in "Afterthoughts" that when a woman is the central protagonist in a film, she is unable to achieve a stable sexual identity but instead is "Torn between the deep blue sea of passive femininity and the devil of regressive masculinity" (123).

This tension is obvious from the very beginning of the film. Often, the camera's opening shot in a film establishes the narrative's context, direction, and purpose. This film opens with a Native American man running through the woods. The scene then transitions to show political negotiations between the unnamed Native American tribe and Reverend Dimmesdale. Although Hester is the film's central

character, she is nowhere to be found in the opening scene. Instead, from the first, the film establishes a sphere of male activity that lies outside of female influence. At the close of the opening scene, the first conflict between masculine and feminine interests develops.³ When the activity of the male sphere has ended, the voice of an unseen female narrator takes over; she tells us that her name is Pearl and that the film we are about to see is, "The story of my mother, Hester Prynne." With this use of voiceover narration, the film tries to establish a female voice so that the story will be seen through the eyes of Pearl and told from her perspective. However, female spectators can only wonder why, if this is Pearl's story of her mother Hester Prynne, did the opening scene of the film remove Pearl's voice and show only patriarchal images of Reverend Dimmesdale and a tribe of Native Americans? It seems that just as the 1934 film included scenes of comic relief to increase the male viewers' interest, this later version also includes scenes to capture and hold the male gaze. In this adaptation, the male-focused scenes are not of friendship or comedy, but of war and overt female sexuality.

The tension in the film text continues after Hester steps into her new homeland. Townspeople stand on the docks to greet the new arrivals disembarking after long journeys from Europe. The *mis en scene* is crafted to show that Hester's

³ It is also at this point that a tension arises between the text of the film and the original text of Hawthorne's novel. The opening scene and the first hour of the film are prologue to the story that is in the novel. The filmmakers attempt to fix these inaccuracies with a caveat inserted into the credits which reads, "Freely adapted from the novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne." The tension between the film's text and history arises here as well when Pearl explains that Hester arrived in 1666. Hester acquires the slave Mituba, whose name is so close to the slave Tituba that it almost requires audience members to link the two together. In addition, though never overtly called Salem, Hester's town is often referred to as the "New Jerusalem" and Puritan witch trials are shown later in the film, even though these took place almost thirty years later.

clothing is glaringly different from the dresses of the other Puritan women. In the novel, Hester is described as beautiful, but also, "lady-like too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterized by a certain staid and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace" (53). The 1995 film's version of Hester is hardly like Hawthorne's antique lady-like portrait. Instead of being quaint and dignified, she is sexualized and fetishized for the camera. This fetishization suppresses Hester's ability to be a completely active character. When she first appears in the film, Hester wears a red and black striped dress of silk that features a tight fitting bodice which laces up the back like a corset. The front of the dress is low cut and a coverlet of black lace is laid over the top her shoulders as a separate collar. Moore's cleavage is visible underneath the black lace, yet at the same time she wears a masculine wide brimmed and buckled hat. The other women wear modest black dresses of coarse fabric with large white collars and small delicate bonnets. The message is mixed; Hester is able to wear a man's hat and establish her independence even though she is a woman, yet she is on display and must show off her cleavage and small waist to create an attractive spectacle for male viewers. One of the town magistrates informs her, "You would do better to use less lace in your dressmaking." After hearing this, Hester looks defiant, but raises her eyebrows and quietly replies, "Indeed." The film is conflicted here because Hester is apparently attempting to demonstrate power against the male establishment by showing off her sexuality, yet at the same time, her sex appeal is carefully crafted specifically for a male audience to take pleasure in and control.

As the next scene opens, Hester is shown at dinner with other townspeople and her “to-be-looked-at-ness” is again emphasized. Each visual element in the dining room is manufactured to enhance Demi Moore as a spectacle for the male viewer. The scene opens with a close-up shot of Demi Moore’s chest underneath a thin white lace collar. The collar lies over the top of Hester’s low cut dress so that Moore’s cleavage is framed by the delicate lace. The camera pulls away and the dinner party is shown praying around a table lit by candles. The soft candlelight shines onto Hester’s face and, the physical differences between Hester and the other Puritan women again become apparent. The other women at the table wear black dresses buttoned all the way up to their chins with plain cotton collars resting over the top. In addition, the other women wear plain white bonnets which cover their hair and fasten around their necks. Like the men at the table, Hester wears no hat. Instead, she has her hair pulled into a braided bun at the top of her head, with several spiral curls hanging down to frame her face. Moore is much more physically attractive than the other Puritan women who, like the 1934 film, are homely, older, matronly figures. Therefore, although Hester seems to be striking out against the patriarchy that runs the community, the visual narrative of the later movie resembles the 1934 film because both use physical appearance and age to set Hester directly at odds with the other women of the town. This forces the conflicts in the story to change from focusing not on a woman against society at large, but focusing instead on women against women controlled-by-men.

The sexualized visual narrative of this scene contrasts with the dialogue spoken by Hester. While showing off her cleavage and clear glowing skin for male viewers, Hester begins to again speak in language that resembles feminist rhetoric. For example, Mistress Stonehall sits across from Hester and invites the new arrival to stay with their family. Hester declines the offer and instead declares that she will be setting up house alone before her husband arrives. Mistress Stonehall exclaims, "Tis not considered fitting for a young woman to live alone her." Reverend Cheever also objects and tells her, "Mistress Prynne, the rules we live by may seem arbitrary to a newcomer, but we have learned the hard way that without absolute order in all matters, we cannot hope to survive here." Master Stonewall agrees saying, "Rules, Mistress Prynne, order, survival." At first, Hester nods amiably, but then she diffidently replies, "Would you have me disobey my husband?" The remark is intended to fluster the authority figures. By referring to her husband's wishes, Hester names a higher male authority which trumps the authority of the townspeople in this matter. The film tries to allow female spectators to take an active gaze through the defiance and quick tongue of the female protagonist. However, in reality, the male spectator is being catered to, for while Hester seems to manipulate the patriarchy by boldly setting the authority of her husband against the authority of the town magistrates, in actuality, she becomes a sexual spectacle for modern male viewers. Hester's unique form of feminism is a careful construction that appeases female viewers with her deceptively bold dialogue, and lulls male viewers into believing that

all women really want is to be submissive wives while looking physically and sexually attractive.

Hester's dialogue throughout the film does allow her to become independent and strong to a degree. However, through its depiction of Hester's mute slave Mituba, the film weakens its messages regarding strong women. Hester purchases Mituba when she ventures into the slave market to purchase two white men who are indentured servants.⁴ While Hester struggles to establish a unified identity, the filmmakers use the silent Mituba only as a visual spectacle for male viewers. In "*The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers*," Jacqueline Bobo explains that American cinema often exploits the myth of the exotic primitive. She writes that the characteristics of this myth include the beliefs that black people are childlike, oversexed, and savages (285-6). Each of these three beliefs is present in this film. When Hester first purchases Mituba, the slave looks up at her with an ingenuous devotion that remains throughout the film as an oversexed child-woman follows her new mistress. The myth of the exotic primitive is exhibited when Mituba is depicted as a childish woman who is sexually carnal and naively innocent at the same time. Although this film at times strikes out against the traditions of the patriarchy, its

⁴ In addition to conflicting messages regarding gender issues, the film is also inconsistent in its messages regarding racial issues. When entering the slave market, Hester is at first appalled when Mituba is offered to her and remarks, "But she's a slave." Then when the slave merchant assures her that Mituba is mute, Hester tells him, "Name your just price." It is unclear as to whether the audience is to believe that Hester really went to the market to purchase indentured servants and is therefore saving Mituba from the horrible slave merchant, or if owning slaves was merely a convention which Hester would have followed. The film's stance on Native Americans is similarly muddled. At some points in the film, Native Americans are depicted as being friends with some colony members such as Mistress Hibbins and Reverend Dimmesdale. At other points in the film, particularly the end, they are reduced to stereotypical savages who yell "Woo woo woo" and raid the town while murdering innocents.

depiction of Mituba as virginal and yet experienced mirrors the 1934 film's fetishized portrayal of Hester and Pearl.⁵

Hester's struggle to find and maintain a stable identity and the film's struggle to find and maintain a stable gaze continue throughout the end of the movie. Along with four other women, Hester is jailed for witchcraft and becomes a silent and passive figure whose role throughout the next few scenes is merely to appear vulnerable and throw melodramatic looks into the camera.⁶ At the same time, the more active Dimmesdale runs through the town, inspects a murder scene, puts out a fire and finds that Chillingworth killed two people before committing suicide. The focus on male activity, able to fully emerge after Hester has been physically removed from the narrative, forces the female spectator to have a passive gaze. While male spectators can identify with the active Dimmesdale, female spectators must wait through these scenes until the passive Hester reenters the film.

After Dimmesdale finishes his stint playing detective and firefighter, Hester and the other women are brought to the town scaffold to be hung for witchcraft. The camera zooms in to show the faces of the women and reveals that they are unable to speak. The women are not only bound, but also gagged with thick leather straps tied into their mouths. Although there are four women being prosecuted, it is Hester who stands on the scaffold in front of the other women with a rope around her neck, even

⁵ As part of the fetishization of Mituba, the film is edited to focus on particular parts of her body at a time. For instance, the eye of the camera will first show her half-naked chest and will then cut to an image of her bare legs. For more information on this process of editing, defined as "dismemberment," see *Deadly Persuasion* by Jean Kilbourne.

⁶ It should be noted that as she is being arrested, Hester speaks what is one of the most laughable lines in the movie. In one of the many historical inaccuracies present in the film, Hester demands that the armed guards give her a warrant before entering her house.

though empty nooses hang next to her. In this way, Hester is made into a spectacle for other characters in the film. She stands alone on a footstool as the other Puritans yell and shout at her.⁷ As Hester remains a spectacle, Dimmesdale once again takes an active role in the film. In Hawthorne's novel, the final scaffold scene involves the minister, Pearl, and Hester; Dimmesdale publicly confesses to being Pearl's father and the three say a tearful goodbye to each other as he dies. In the novel, the crowd becomes silent and removes part of the public spectacle from the family tableau as Dimmesdale speaks only to Pearl and Hester. The reverend says that God is merciful and helped bring forgiveness to him by, "Sending yonder dark and terrible old man to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people. Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever" (256-7)

In the film, the minister's confession of sin is removed, and the scaffold scene is made into more of a spectacle as the entire town gathers to hiss and jeer at the women being hung for witchcraft. Dimmesdale's declaration of guilt and tender words to his lover and daughter are replaced with a speech in which the minister admits his adultery, but goes on to condemn the Puritan community. He looks out into the crowd and says:

⁷ In actuality, there is some confusion here as to what precisely the women are being hung for. Immediately before the scaffold scene, magistrates are led to believe that Thomas Cheever was murdered by Native Americans. They yell to the townspeople to gather up the Native Americans and throw them into jail. Hester and the other women were already in jail at this point, and so it seems as if the consensus is that all of the evil will be cast out of the town or put to death. It is implied that the women and the Native Americans are thought to be tied together in some way, but exactly how or why they are connected is unclear. In general, the camera shows many townspeople running around chaotically without any clear indication as to what their intentions are. The implication is only that these Puritans are crazy and they hate anyone who does not adhere to their beliefs.

There is no witchcraft here. If we hang these women, then what have we become? Who are we to condemn on God's behalf? I love this woman. I am the father of her child. In God's eyes, I am her husband. Now if you must hang someone to appease your anger and your fear, then hang me.

Hester has apparently wanted to speak this invective throughout the entire film, but was unable to and is unable to still as, like Mistress Bartle of the earlier film, Hester is now literally bound and gagged. Instead, Hester is denied the chance to defend herself and remains a silent spectacle for the audience. In another act of substitution in which one character assumes the sins of another, Dimmesdale takes an active stance against the Puritans, lifts a passive Hester off of her pedestal, stands on the footstool himself, and places the rope around his neck. All that Hester is able to do is look up at Dimmesdale silently and lovingly with tears in her eyes. She is physically held back by armed guards as the crowd begins to chant, "Hang him! Hang him!" Hester's eyes become red and she struggles to free herself when suddenly and unexpectedly, the guard about to hang Dimmesdale is shot by a Native American arrow. Indians raid the town, Dimmesdale frees Hester from her bonds and the two find Pearl and run to safety.

After the family is safe, the film cuts in a series of inter-spliced shots that show Puritans being slaughtered in the raid. Then just as inexplicably and abruptly as they came, the Native Americans leave. The film fades to black and in its final scene, struggles to reestablish the active female spectatorship it successfully suppressed

during the last ninety minutes. Hester is kneeling at the grave of Roger Prynne whom Dimmesdale had found hanging by his own hand. As Dimmesdale walks over to Hester and they kneel together. Dimmesdale then says that the governor will have the letter removed and will make a public apology to Hester. Hester stands and removes the scarlet letter herself and hands it to Pearl. Hester states, "This letter has served a purpose, but not the one they had intended. So why would I stay here to be accepted by them, to be tamed by them?" She tells Dimmesdale that they came to America to make a new world and for Pearl's sake she will do just that.

Hester becomes the active figure in the narrative once again as she places Pearl into the seat of a wagon and then hops into the center seat and picks up the reins. The gesture is meant to be symbolic and alludes to the fact that Hester will no longer be like a horse who is driven by the whims of others, but will instead be the driver and take control of her life. Dimmesdale tells her that she can go, but not without him; he jumps up to sit beside her. Instead of handing him the reins, Hester remains in control of the wagon. No longer passive or willing to be silenced, Hester is now an active driver in control of her destiny and snaps the reins to urge on the horses. As the two lovers ride away, they are made into a spectacle of once again as Hester remarks, "They're watching us." Dimmesdale leans over and kisses her as she drives. The toddler Pearl, who is silent throughout the film, drops the scarlet letter onto the muddy ground and the adult Pearl resumes narration, proving that like Hester, she too is an active woman. The film ends with Pearl's narration as she concludes, "Who can say what is a sin in God's eyes?" The themes of sin,

forgiveness, and redemption are completely excised from the narrative with this final statement. With this statement, the film attempts to impose late twentieth century values on the nineteenth century text. It tries to allow women to control their own sexuality and decide what is right for them, but the visual narrative and conflicting elements of the film undercut this message.

Instead of being able to maintain a distinct gaze throughout the entirety of the film, the filmmakers struggle to embody the gazes of both women and men. Bruce Daniels wrote, "Hawthorne's Hester needs no help: she is one of the most commanding feminists in American literature and towers over Moore's Hester as a strong figure to be admired" (3). Indeed, Daniels is correct. The film seems to want to show Hester both as a feminist and as a sex object. As in the conflicted storylines of the 1934 film, this later adaptation tries to have something for everyone, but results in a chaotic mishmash that doesn't seem to know what it wants to be, what it wants to say, or whom it wants to represent. The filmmakers want to say something with their intense symbolic use of elements such as fire and Native Americans, their inclusion of both male and female nudity, and their use of a plot which encompasses various points of Puritan history. However, much of this intended symbolism is lost as the film vacillates between portraying Hester as a passive martyr and portraying her as an active participant who fights against the Puritan system. Since the film is unable to establish a stable identity for Hester, it ultimately fails and is unable to find or maintain a stable or unified spectatorship.

“What Are You Looking at Sir?” Shifting Spectators in *The Last of the Mohicans*

The 1936 version of *The Last of the Mohicans* focuses on the male hierarchy and the women who threaten to disrupt it. To maintain this focus, the filmmakers change several narrative elements of James Fenimore Cooper’s original novel. In the novel, Cora is a strong and intelligent woman of mixed race who helps to take care of and protect her younger half-sister Alice. This early cinematic adaptation makes no mention of the girls’ racial differences and arbitrarily changes their names so that Alice is the older stronger sister and Cora is her younger weaker counterpart.

The film further alters the sisters’ identities by changing the novel’s ending. In the novel, Cora Munro is taken as Magua’s wife. When Uncas tries to rescue her, both he and Cora are fatally stabbed by Huron men. In the 1936 film, Cora is taken to be Magua’s wife, but after Uncas dies fighting to save her, she commits suicide. Alice’s fate is changed as well. The only romance in the novel exists between Duncan Heyward and Alice; by the narrative’s end, they are reported to be married. In the beginning of the film, Alice refuses Duncan’s proposal and later becomes romantically involved with Hawkeye.

The film is directed by George Seitz and stars Randolph Scott as Hawkeye, Binnie Barnes as Alice Munro, Henry Wilcoxon as Duncan Heyward, Heather Angel as Cora Munro, Philip Reed as Uncas, Robert Barrat as Chingachgook, and Bruce Cabot as Magua. It plays to male viewers by creating a hierarchy amongst the men in the narrative which values honor, physical power, strength in war, and an ability to survive the natural elements. Male characters compete with one another to gain a

higher status in this social order, while women are often only the trophies of those who have succeeded. For example, at first, Alice and Cora belong to their father Captain Munro. Later, he proves to be weak when fighting against the French and the two girls are transferred into the hands of younger stronger men. Duncan and Hawkeye fight verbally over Alice and because Hawkeye is the more virile of the two, he wins her affections. To balance the narrative, Magua and Uncas fight physically over Cora. In this way, male spectatorship is enhanced because while female characters are forced to become passive chattel, male viewers are able to identify with the masculine heroes of the film who fight the enemy and win the girl.

Both Cora and Alice represent threats to the male hierarchy. At several points throughout the film, Alice attempts to establish herself as a vocal and active character, but is continually shoved aside in favor of male interests. In the end, she is re-enfolded into the patriarchal scheme because of her romantic involvement with Hawkeye and her feminine devotion to him. In "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that women are put in front of the camera as fetishized objects to be sexually exploited and enjoyed by scopophilic male spectators. She also argues that male spectators participate actively while viewing a film because they can identify with male characters who carry out most of the film's activity. The ultimate suppression of Alice's activity also suppresses the female gaze and allows Alice to become a passive object to be controlled by male viewers.

The female gaze is also suppressed through Cora because like Alice, Cora is also unable to enter the male sphere of influence. Alice tries to become an active

participant in the patriarchy, but Cora seems to exist only for men to look at and enjoy. She is passive, submissive, and flirtatious but almost entirely written out of the film. However, the film does not need Cora merely to satisfy the requirements of adapting Cooper's novel. She is used to reinforce her sister's activity. When watching Alice, female spectators might feel as if they have a more active gaze because Alice seems twice as strong and active when compared to Cora. In several scenes when Alice tries to exercise her power, Cora counter balances her sister's strength and becomes even more passive. This counterbalancing where one woman is made strong only at the expense of the other helps to balance the masculine hierarchical power structure and makes the female duo less significant and less threatening.

The gaze of female spectators is more active in 1992 adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans*, which is directed by Michael Mann and stars Daniel Day-Lewis as Hawkeye, Madeline Stowe as Cora Munro, Jodhi May as Alice Munro, Wes Studi as Magua, Russell Means as Chingachgook, Eric Schweig as Uncas, and Steven Waddington as Duncan Heyward. The 1992 film is based on both the 1936 film and Cooper's novel. Like its predecessor, this version also makes no mention of Cora's biracial background, but does switch the sister's names so that Cora is the older stronger sister and Alice is the weaker younger sister. At the same time, this later adaptation also retains the 1936 film's plot changes; the older Munro sister Cora rejects Duncan and becomes romantically involved with Hawkeye and her younger sister Alice commits suicide after being taken by Magua.

Unlike its predecessor, in the 1992 film, Cora is an active character who, to a certain extent, participates in the combative male sphere. She does possess a certain “to-be-looked-at-ness,” so that male spectators are able to take pleasure in looking at her. At the same time, however, Cora shoots at Native Americans, works in Fort William Henry’s surgery unit, and acts as a caretaker for her younger sister Alice. Female spectators are able to have an active viewing experience when watching the film because they can mentally identify with Cora’s endeavors. In addition, Cora’s identity is less fractured than cinematic interpretations of Hester Prynne. She is romantically involved with Hawkeye, but does not change drastically when this romance blossoms. She remains the feisty and forceful character that she was in the beginning of the film and actually seems to be more active and effective by the end of the film.

The later adaptation also mirrors its predecessor by balancing out Cora’s masculine activity with Alice’s feminine passivity. Alice is almost entirely silent throughout the film. She is weak and ineffectual—crying or standing still as if in shock as Cora fights to protect her. Affection between Alice and Uncas is diminished even further in this film than the corresponding storyline of the earlier adaptation and consists merely of a few silent glances between the two would-be lovers. Cora enhances the spectatorship of women, but Alice diminishes it. Women cannot identify with Alice or live out the film’s action through her passive character. It seems as if Alice is merely placed in the film either for male viewing pleasure or to fulfill the requirements of adapting Cooper’s novel.

The role of men both enhances and suppresses the female gaze. As in the earlier adaptation, men in this film are constantly at odds with each other. There is an unspoken hierarchy which values honor, strength, and an ability to conquer nature. This focus on male activity helps to increase the effectiveness of an active male gaze. However, the hierarchy also values physical attractiveness and places Hawkeye and Uncas in the film as physical objects to be enjoyed by female spectators. In this way, both female and male characters are made into spectacles for viewers to enjoy and control.

The Last of the Mohicans 1936.

The early adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans* is steeped in the patriarchal order and continually shows the differences between the male sphere of influence and activity and the female sphere of passivity which taints and threatens to destroy the patriarchy. The idea of femininity tainting the male sphere first becomes clear when the film creates a hierarchy amongst the male characters which favors masculine traits such as strength, knowledge of the frontier, and skill in battle. Hawkeye is at the top of this hierarchy; he is revered by the film's American frontiersmen and Native Americans and is a serious threat to the British officers. Duncan is also placed near the top of the hierarchy. His importance is demonstrated through the film's narrative focus on the differences between the British officers and the American colonists.⁸ Hawkeye is established as an American hero who fights against the British, French, and Huron. In the beginning of the film, Hawkeye argues with Heyward and in doing so, shows himself to be an independent man of principles who is willing to fight anyone in order to maintain American freedom. As the film progresses, Hawkeye proves himself to be stronger and more intelligent than the other men.

Due to Hawkeye's prominence, the film's female characters are further diminished in importance and, through Hawkeye's heroics, the male spectator is

⁸ These differences are also reinforced by the narrative's concentration on a love triangle between Duncan, Hawkeye, and Alice. In his essay, "A Breed Apart," Gary Edgerton explains that through the film's love triangle and concentration on American and the British interests, the filmmakers shift narrative elements of Cooper's novel to focus the story on Europeans instead of Native Americans (4). In effect, these changes set up a male hierarchy in which Native Americans are inferior to Caucasian men.

allowed to control the action of the film. Female spectators must sit with a passive gaze until either Cora or Alice is allowed to reenter the film in a strong or prominent role.⁹ Women are placed at the bottom of the hierarchal order of power; even the marginalized and racially stereotyped Native Americans have greater importance than Cora and Alice who are pushed aside in these scenes. At this point in the film, male spectators have an active gaze and are entirely in control of the images on screen. Men watching the movie might be able to identify with the refined Duncan or with the crude machismo of the Americans. In contrast, women watching the film have no one to identify with and can take little pleasure in watching the movie.

In her article, "*Alien* and the Monstrous-Feminine," Barbara Creed explained that in film, women are often seen as the "other," the thing which taints or destroys men. Using psychoanalytical theory, Creed describes two female archetypes. The first is the castrated woman who, "Is present in all horror films as the blackness of extinction—death [...] gives rise to a terror of self disintegration, of losing one's self or ego" (136-7). The second archetype is the phallic woman who is monstrous because she, "Is not there to meet the desires of the male fetishist, but rather to signify the monstrousness of woman's desire to have a phallus" (139). Creed's essay discusses representations of women and the feminine in horror and science fiction film; however, her theories can be applied to this early adaptation of *The Last of the*

⁹ This scene uses horribly stereotypical images of Native Americans. Uncas and Chingachgook are portrayed as "noble savages" who are intelligent and, to some degree, respect the prominence of white men such as Hawkeye. On the other hand, Magua and his tribe are depicted as feral bloodthirsty savages who will not be satisfied until the white men are massacred. For more information on racism in this film and the later adaptation see "A Breed Apart" by Gary Edgerton and "Deconstructing an American Myth: Hollywood and *The Last of the Mohicans*" by Jeffery Walker.

Mohicans. Alice is a more powerful character and threatens the patriarchal establishment because she desires to obtain the phallus—the locus of power. Alice frightens male characters because she continually tries to assert her control and therefore could make men seem insignificant. She must have the phallus completely removed from her grasp. In the beginning of the movie, Colonel Munro tries to make Alice more submissive by dismissing his daughter's political interests and reminding her of her feminine duties. However, Alice still attempts to enter male society and so, by the end of the film, through the power of his romantic love, Hawkeye must tame Alice in order to make her into a normal woman with less strength and influence.

Cora occupies the opposite end of the spectrum. Unlike Alice, she does not maintain any source of power. She is not the keeper of a phallus, but rather the castrated woman. It could be possible that as a castrated and submissive woman, Cora might not pose a threat to the patriarchy. She could act simply as a signifier of passive womanhood to be fetishized and enjoyed by male characters and male spectators. However, as a castrated woman, Cora is perhaps even more frightening than Alice. Cora goes beyond merely lacking her own power, she seems to absorb the power of the men around her and because of this, contact with Cora is tainted. Instead of being able to fill Cora with his own power, Uncas has power sucked from him until, like a weak powerless woman, he too is castrated. Creed explains that the castrated woman represents the death of the ego. Chingachgook's comments support this theory, for he seems to recognize that Cora's femininity is killing the warrior's spirit that Uncas originally possessed. In the end, contact with Cora causes the literal

death of Uncas as he is murdered while trying to protect her. It is almost necessary that Cora commit suicide after her lover dies because it is not until after Cora's suicide in this same scene that her feminine threat of contamination is effectively extinguished.

The sisters are first featured in the film during a ball which excludes American colonists and Native Americans and instead focuses instead on a more delicate feminine atmosphere inhabited by upper class women and British officers. Cora Munro is immediately put on display as she dances with a young man while being observed by her father and another older officer. In the original novel, Colonel Munro tells Duncan that Cora is the product of a racially mixed marriage. He says, "Duty called me to the West Indies. There it was my lot to form a connection with one who in time became my wife and the mother of Cora" (182). Munro continues to explain that Cora's mother was descended "from that unfortunate class who are so basely enslaved to administer to the wants of a luxurious people" (182). Unlike the strong woman of mixed race from Cooper's novel, the cinematic adaptation of Cora is a blond, pale faced, and passive little girl. As she dances with British officers, flirts, and giggles while making her blond ringlets bounce, Cora is stared at by her father and other older officers. The edited cuts between Cora's flirtations and her father's watchful eye create a distinctive patriarchal gaze. In this way, as soon as Cora appears on screen, she is made into a fetishized spectacle for the scopophilic male

audience.¹⁰ This fetishization allows men to control Cora's image and therefore helps to reduce the threat that she poses to the patriarchy.

As a completely passive spectacle, Cora is the castrated woman and threatens to taint the men around her. After the camera leaves Cora, it focuses on her sister Alice who, through her strength, threatens to become the phallic woman archetype who forcibly removes masculine authority. The camera follows Duncan as he leaves the ballroom to speak with Alice. Alice is dark haired and more serious than her younger sister and the *mis en scene* in this portion of the scene is not structured to put Alice on display the way Cora was put on display moments earlier. Alice stands facing Duncan and they seem as if they are literally on equal footing. Alice wears a modest dress which does not reveal cleavage to either Duncan or male audience members. Alice is not a giggling schoolgirl, but speaks with strength and walks with dignity. However, even though Alice is portrayed as a modest serious young woman, the camera still favors male spectators. Earlier, it followed Duncan as he traveled from England to America. Before Hawkeye appears in the film, Duncan is at the center of all action and women like Alice and Cora are merely on the fringes of that action. This is reinforced when the ballroom scene, at which women were somewhat featured, ends with Colonel Munro announcing that all officers must immediately abandon their dance partners to report for duty. The officers are shown happily rushing out as the women of the scene stand there—motionless and ineffectual.

¹⁰ Part of the eradication of Cora's race is related to MPPDA rules which at that time had effectively banned any mention of miscegenation from film (Miller 40). However, at the same time, the film's obliteration of Cora's racial differences adds to her one-dimensional personality.

As a phallic woman, Alice tries to enter into the male sphere to gain power, but is continually denied access. Her first attempt occurs after Duncan gives a speech to the American colonists and tries to recruit them to fight against the French. While the British officers stand in great ceremony, beating drums and wearing their starched uniforms, the American colonists stand below his balcony in disarray. In this public arena, Duncan argues with Hawkeye because the trapper wants the colonists to stay out of Britain's war with France. As the two men argue, the camera cuts to a close-up shot of the faces of Cora and Alice. The two sisters stand away from the action. Cora looks up to Alice and the camera shows her worried face, perfect blond ringlets, and light yellow low-cut dress. Alice wears her hair in a bun at the back of her head with a few curls hanging down. Her dress is blue, darker than Cora's, and instead of having a low-cut neckline, there is a high white ruff at her throat. The filmmakers attempt to distinguish the differences between the sisters through these choices in coloring and attire. Cora is meant to be the lighter, passive, more frivolous girl, while Alice is meant to be a more serious and active woman. However, except for physical appearance, the purposes of each sister in the scene are nearly undistinguishable. Both women are spectacles of melodrama added to heighten the theatrical tensions of the film. Their worried glances indicate that they are inept and cannot actually do anything in this scene. They are present only as visual reminders of the rewards won by men at the top of the masculine hierarchy and can only look passively at the action while being looked at by the male audience. In this way, the female gaze is suppressed; the action lies entirely in the hands of the patriarchy and female

spectators can only passively watch the images on the screen while male spectators have access to a more active and controlling gaze.

The scene shifts as the colonists agree to fight for the British and Duncan, Cora, Alice, and Colonel Munro return to Munro's office. Alice tries to enter into the political situation that she was only able to witness earlier in the scene. Again, only Alice is allowed to be active. Alice's activity comes at the expense of her sister who is weakened further by being removed from the scene. Although in the room, Cora immediately disappears from view to counterbalance Alice's strong behavior. Alice walks over to her father and asks, "Who was that man talking back to Duncan? I thought we hang traitors." This is Alice's way of entering into the patriarchal political discussion. She attempts to analyze the situation and to do so, she tries to engage both Duncan and her father in an active discussion regarding political beliefs and governmental policies. It is apparent that Alice almost entirely agrees with every belief that her father holds and she asks this almost rhetorical question in part to win her father's approval for her patriotic spirit which holds England sovereign over the inferior colonies. However, Alice also seems to be trying to understand the debate that just occurred and, as she was not able to enter into the public debate directly, she continues the discussion over political affairs in this safer private environment.

When Alice attempts to verbalize her political beliefs she is immediately rejected. After Alice asks her father why Hawkeye is not hung for treason, he replies, "Well my dear, this is a country of forests, but I doubt we'd there'd be enough trees to go around if we started hanging people for speaking their minds." At this point,

Alice is standing in between her father and Duncan. Both men look down at Alice and Colonel Munro puts his arm around her and pats her as if she were a child. He then continues, "Now, run along and play. If you keep one man waiting it's coquetry, but a thousand—treason!" He pats Alice again and smiles warmly at her as she leaves the male sphere. His last words completely change the purpose of Alice's argument. Alice attempted to enter into the male world of combat, patriotism, and war by talking about the political realities of treason. By using the word "treason" in his final statement to Alice, Colonel Munro has turned his daughter's words around from a serious discussion on political treason to a meaningless quip about the supposed flirtatious and coy games that women play to grab the attentions of men. It is as if Alice were not a woman trying to understand the dangerous political situation she is in the midst of, but only a young child who is so ignorant of her surroundings that all she is able to do is play with her even younger and more ignorant sister.

Written in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* explains that female myths and archetypes attempt to embrace one quality of a woman and apply it to her whole being so that, in fiction, instead of being multi-dimensional as male characters are allowed to be, a female character is summed up as a person through one particular quality (1406-7). De Beauvoir writes that patriarchal society is based on the retention of male power and the fear that "women, employing their erotic attraction, can induce young men and even fathers or families to scatter their patrimonies" (1407). The filmmakers attempt to force both Cora and Alice into the archetypal framework of a one dimensional character. As De Beauvoir noted, instead of being a complex

woman who is concerned with politics, Alice is merely a girl getting in the way of her father's work. By using Colonel Munro's reference to her coquetry and flirtatiousness, the filmmakers would have the audience believe that Alice is trying to scatter his patrimony through her erotic attractions. She has already lured Duncan away from his primary duties as an officer because he is led to think of her as a romantic interest. Now, she is trying to take away her father's strength as a military commander by interfering with his work. The female gaze is again suppressed. Women spectators attempt to actively watch the film through the character of Alice; when she is denied access to the sphere of patriarchal influence, they too are rebuffed and reminded that women are to be passive viewers because men are meant to control the action and gaze of the film.

De Beauvoir's arguments can also be applied to Cora. She is a one dimensional archetypal character throughout the film and her potential romance with Uncas threatens to tear down patriarchal systems because Uncas is a Native American and considered a racial other by the Americans and British.¹¹ There seems to be a danger which emanates from Cora; the film stresses her ineffectiveness by focusing on the fact that she is an entirely passive character and must therefore be taken care of at all times. When Uncas interacts with her, they do not have an equal exchange of ideas, but rather emphasis is placed on the fact that Uncas is somewhat burdened with his child-like charge. For example, during their first exchange before arriving at Fort

¹¹ This physical separation is due in part to the MPPDA morality code which stated that miscegenation was not allowed to be depicted in film (Miller 40). The part of Uncas is played by a Caucasian man to take away some of the tension arising from Cora's interest in him. To further remove the threat of miscegenation from the film, Uncas speaks Pidgin English and talks to Cora about her deceased beau which lessens the implication that he will become romantically involved with her.

William Henry, Uncas gives Cora a blanket and tells her to lie down and rest. Later, Uncas gives Cora pieces of food and practically hand feeds them to her as if she is incapable of even the most basic act of feeding herself. As Uncas hand feeds Cora, Chingachgook looks at his son and yells, "Mohican chief no wait on squaw!" Uncas immediately leaves Cora's side and grabs his rifle. With this action, Uncas immediately leaves the sphere of passive femininity and reenters the male realm of activity and influence.

After the group reaches the fort, another conversation takes place between Cora and Uncas. This second conversation is almost identical to the first. It is offset by dialogue between Hawkeye and Alice, focuses on the fetishized image of Cora, and ends with Chingachgook's verbalization of his displeasure with the situation. Cora and Uncas stand at the edge of the fort and say goodbye as he prepares to leave with his father and Hawkeye. She is wearing more makeup than before; earlier, the makeup team used only natural tones to highlight her eyes, cheeks, and lips. This time, she is anachronistically wearing bright blue eye shadow, pink blush, and dark red lipstick. As in the earlier scene, the lighting here is focused on Cora's face so that Uncas stands in shadow. The *mis en scene* depicts the two lovers standing across from each other with Uncas looking down into Cora's face. At first it seems as if this placement could be due to the actors' natural differences in height, but upon closer examination it is clear that Cora is standing on ground which is lower and Uncas has one foot resting on a stump to give him more height. This displacement gives Uncas a distinct physical advantage over Cora. He looks tall and powerful, while she looks

diminutive and weak. The situation enhances the male gaze because although Uncas is a Native American, as a male, he is allowed to have some superiority over Cora because she is a woman. Here, Uncas is made into an active character while Cora is put on display.

The entire interaction in this scene is seen from a male perspective and further suppresses the female gaze. The camera shows Hawkeye and Chingachgook speaking together; it cuts away to show the men from behind and follows their gazes as they watch Cora and Uncas talking together. When the potential lovers finish speaking, the camera travels back to Chingachgook and Hawkeye to interpret what they have just witnessed. To reinforce his superiority over women regardless of his race, Chingachgook says, "Pale faced squaw no good for warrior. Fair hair make heart of Uncas weak like water." Hawkeye laughs and replies, "You can't blame him Sagamore." Then Chingachgook looks disgustedly at Hawkeye and closes the scene by stating, "Hawkeye's heart weak like water." Chingachgook leaves and Alice immediately appears. The reappearance of Alice implies that through seduction, women make men weak, distract them, and pull them away from important lifesaving activity with irrelevant flirtations and other feminine concerns.

In the end of the film, the threat posed to the masculine hierarchy by both sisters is eliminated. Cora's threat is extinguished with her death; to extinguish the threat posed by Alice, the film re-enfolds her into the traditional patriarchal scheme by pairing her romantically with Hawkeye. She is tamed and pacified by the film's hero. As a man with the power of a Native American and the intelligence of a

European, Hawkeye's masculine qualities have allowed him to win the girl—effectively taking her away from her ignorant father and her weak and incompetent lover. When Alice visits her new lover in jail, she renounces her previous understanding of politics and war by gazing up at him and whispering, “I don't know the wrong or the right of it. All I know is they hang traitors and they'll hang you.” This scene marks Hawkeye's final transformation into the romantic hero. The filmmakers give him a make-over by adding softer lighting to the scene, removing Hawkeye's coonskin cap and allowing his curly blond hair to frame his face. Alice looks different as well and is wearing lipstick and a low-cut dress. She is more submissive and simpers at Hawkeye through the prison bars.

In this way, after being won by Hawkeye, Alice is part of the traditional patriarchal scheme and put on display for male viewers, while the female gaze is suppressed. Without the love triangle between Hawkeye, Heyward and Alice, Alice's image would be more difficult for male viewers to take pleasure in or control. In her book *From Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell explains that love triangles allow women to be viewed and interpreted from two points of view. Thus, a female character trapped in a love triangle is more passive because she is “less an active-role player than a passive receptacle [...] she is not so much perpetuating an illusion as being selectively appreciated” (97-8).

The triangle between Hawkeye, Heyward, and Alice allows spectators to look at Alice from two differing perspectives. For Duncan, she is a sometimes cool, sometimes levelheaded and serious longtime friend. For Hawkeye, she is more

submissive, feminine, and romantically passionate. Alice's image might otherwise be difficult for the male viewer to grasp, but through the film's use of the love triangle, male spectators are able to take the gaze of either Hawkeye or Heyward and can then contain Alice's image more effectively. She can be limited and restricted by the combined gazes of the two men and be placed into the archetypal mold of either a cold and distant ice queen or a warm and doting wife. In addition, because Hawkeye is the man who tames Alice, he gains an advantage over Duncan and maintains his place at the top of the male hierarchy.

After feminine threat has been extinguished, the masculine hierarchy is peacefully restored when, at the end of the film, Hawkeye decides to fight with Duncan Heyward against the French. Alice, previously interested in following her father to Fort William Henry to be if not active, at least present for the battle, has now been relegated to the passive position of waiting for the men to return.¹² As Alice says goodbye to Hawkeye, she acts submissively and tells him, "You know, it takes more than rifles to make a new civilization, it takes spinning wheels too. That's the woman's way of it. When you come back, I'll be waiting for you in Albany." Hawkeye and Heyward then reenter the male sphere of activity as they leave to fight the French and Alice is left waiting for her hero to return. The female spectator must passively watch as Alice is unable to participate in the action and is stripped of most of her strength and passion. Now, Alice is only able to show passion for Hawkeye

¹² Edgerton notes that the final scenes have been noted to be reminiscent of the political situation in America as WWII broke out in Europe. Americans were deciding whether or not to join England in the war as their wives stayed home. In this similar scene, Hawkeye, the representation of America, decides to fight with Heyward, the representation of England, as his love interest Alice keeps the home fires warm while waiting for him.

and therefore, male spectators are able to enjoy and take control of her image. The threat of passive feminine contamination ended with the death of Cora. Now that Alice has been effectively tamed by her heroic lover, she no longer threatens to enter into the masculine sphere or disrupt the male hierarchy. Therefore, at the close of the film, male spectators are able to reclaim their active and pleasurable viewing experience while the active female gaze is again denied.

The Last of the Mohicans 1992

Michael Mann wrote, produced and directed the later version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, but the film's opening credits state that Mann based his adaptation both on Cooper's novel and on the 1936 screen version. Throughout the film, Mann attempts to create a pleasurable viewing experience for both male and female spectators by allowing both Hawkeye and Cora to be active characters at times and at other times, be spectacles for voyeuristic audience members to appreciate and enjoy. However, even though Cora is an active character, her sister Alice is completely passive, weak, and sickly; she walks around listlessly and has few lines in the film. In addition, the film establishes a distinctively masculine realm of activity which is kept separate from the female world. Although the filmmakers do update some elements of the narrative, this separation of male and female activity takes an even more conservative view of Cooper's novel which does describe the Munro sisters using delicate terms such as, "lovely beings" and "gentle ones" (14, 303). However, at the same time, when traveling in the wilderness together, the men and women of the novel are not fully constrained by their socially separated spheres. Therefore when in the wilderness, the Munro sisters are able to exercise more autonomy than they are able to use in the civilized world. For example, Cooper writes that Hawkeye speaks with the sisters and Duncan and asks if they can follow him to fight the Native Americans. Cora's response is as follows, "'We are equal' said Cora, firmly. 'On such an errand we will follow to any danger'" (161).

The film makes the story's hero into a sexualized spectacle for the enjoyment of female viewers. However, here the female gaze works differently than the scopophilic male gaze. Traditionally, women are put on passive display for men to look at and control. Here, Hawkeye is put on display, but never becomes passive.

Through the camera's representation of Hawkeye as an active character, male viewers are able to control the images on screen. In "Visual Pleasure," Laura Mulvey wrote that a male movie star was glamorized not to become eroticized for female viewers, but to represent the "more perfect, more complete, more ideal ego" of the typical male viewer (64). In this film, male spectators are able to realize their egos' fulfillment through the hyper-masculinity of Hawkeye. He is not only an active character, but the most active; he is not only strong or fast, but the strongest and the fastest; he is not only slightly attractive, but the most handsome man in the film. Hawkeye is a spectacle, but at the same time, he has the most active gaze of any character in the film. The scene may seem somewhat conflicted as it searches out a unified spectatorship, but at the same time, it allows both male and female audience members to have active viewing experiences. Male viewers are able to take on the role of Hawkeye and are able to control the other images of the film. Female viewers are able to enjoy and take pleasure in watching Hawkeye's image, even though they cannot control him or identify with him as a representation of their ideal egos.

The film opens as Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas chase down a deer. Hawkeye and Uncas begin the scene with their shirts partially open, but Chingachgook's body is completely covered. Hawkeye leads the three men but as the

chase continues, Uncas catches up to him. In contrast, the older man Chingachgook wheezes and gasps as he tries to keep up with his sons. The camera's eye flips between the three men and as it focuses back on Hawkeye, the audience is able to see that he has discarded his shirt and now runs while fully displaying his muscular upper body. As other with women who are made into spectacles, the *mis en scene* in this scene is crafted to give Hawkeye has a certain "to-be-looked-at-ness." While the three men run through a forest and a brook, the scene's lighting at times shines on the mist that rises from the water, and at other times shines as slim columns through the trees. At all times, however, the light is focused specifically on Hawkeye. Uncas' face does not often come into focus and is frequently shown in shadow. When the face of Chingachgook is shown, the film stresses his age by using lighting and makeup to make the wrinkles around his neck and eyes to appear more prominent. In contrast, when Hawkeye is shown in a close-up, the camera focuses on his strong facial features and naked torso. The camera lingers on his strong biceps, swelling pectorals, and hardened abdominals. In this film, Hawkeye has longer hair and his chest is smooth and hairless. These two traits are used to make him seem more like a Native American. Therefore similar to the 1936 film, the lighting, costuming, and camerawork are used to place Hawkeye at the top of the male hierarchy as he is a perfect representation of both racial groups. He is the most intelligent, most noble Native American and the strongest and fastest Caucasian.

Even though Hawkeye is made into a spectacle, he never becomes a passive character. The camera seems to compensate for making Hawkeye into a fetishized

sexual object for viewers to enjoy by not allowing spectators to control his image. Hawkeye is never a passive object, but is continuously active throughout each scene as he runs, jumps, and shoots the deer. To enhance the male gaze and once again allow the male viewer to experience the film vicariously through Hawkeye, the camera takes Hawkeye's perspective. When Uncas and Hawkeye stop to kill the deer, Hawkeye raises his rifle and the camera cuts away to show the deer through his eyes. As Uncas and Hawkeye navigate through the woods chasing the deer, the two men demonstrate an ability to conquer nature.

The 1936 adaptation of the novel featured Alice becoming interested in the politics of war and depicted her struggles as she tried to live in a patriarchal world. In these opening scenes of the 1992 adaptation, both Alice and Cora are denied access to this male sphere of activity. In the earlier film, Alice acts as a bridge between the masculine and feminine realms; in the later film, it is Duncan who ties these two worlds together as he moves between the masculine sphere of conflict, combat and force, and the female sphere of home, hearth and delicacy.

Duncan is slightly pudgy and has a pasty face which is made even paler by his powdered hair. Unlike Hawkeye, who possesses masculine facial features, Duncan has a rounded feminine face with a small and receded nose, an undefined jaw line, a rounded chin, and a weak brow line. The filmmakers have turned Cooper's masculine characterization of Duncan into a male/female hybrid, suggesting that femininity is lined to the refined British civilization and masculinity is linked to the rugged American frontier. While Duncan does at times have an active gaze, he is not

entirely masculine, but instead is a somewhat feminine unattractive man who is inferior to Hawkeye in every way. This feminization drastically changes the original novel's characterization of Duncan.

While Cooper's Duncan is perhaps not as adept as Hawkeye, he is familiar with nature, frontier battle, and Native American culture. The Native American tribes call Duncan "the open hand" and when he finds and rescues Alice, he demonstrates an incredible understanding of nature. When Duncan dresses up as a Native American fool to enter the Huron camp and rescue Alice, he becomes the book's adventurous hero and when he consoles her with, "soothing tenderness," he becomes the book's romantic hero as well (300-5).

In the film, Duncan's ineptitude as a hero is first demonstrated when the British party is attacked by the Huron on the way to Fort William Henry. The initial attack on the party is in part due to Duncan's incompetence. He does not understand the differences between the Huron and the Delaware and therefore unwisely trusts Magua. In addition, because Duncan is slightly feminine, he has too much sympathy for the women in the group. Therefore, when the sickly Alice requests that they stop, Duncan insists that the party stop immediately. When he informs Magua that they must stop marching, the Native American guide replies that the Englishman is a dog for his women. The film further stresses Duncan's inexperience when the war party attacks. The Huron use guerilla war tactics; they hide in the brush and stalk the party, waiting for an opportune time to strike. Before the Huron attack, the film cuts to Hawkeye, Uncas, and Chingachgook interpreting the disrupted signs in the natural

world in order to track the war party's trail. The camera then cuts back to Duncan, Cora, and Alice as the Huron attack. When the Native Americans begin their attack, Duncan lines up his men in two straight lines to present arms. The military men are quickly slaughtered as Duncan remains atop his horse. Then, Duncan jumps to the ground and fumbles for his sword as a Huron warrior moves in to kill him. Duncan seems almost helpless and it is Hawkeye who swoops in to rescue Duncan by shooting the Huron. After Duncan is saved by Hawkeye, Chingachgook runs past to follow one of the Huron and seeing him, Duncan grabs the gun of a fallen British officer. He aims to shoot Chingachgook and Hawkeye steps up to him, pulls down the weapon, smiles and sarcastically remarks, "In case your aim's any better than your judgment."

There is a clearly defined hierarchy in this film much like there was in the earlier adaptation. In this film, Duncan is ignorant of the nature and culture of the colonies. He cannot decipher the differences between the Huron and Delaware. He cannot read the signs of the wilderness. He cannot fight stealthily or in direct hand to hand combat. Duncan is not as attractive, strong, or intelligent as Hawkeye. Unlike the 1996 version of *Little Women*, which places importance on the sensitive male, this film equates masculinity with active ruggedness and femininity with passive weakness. Here, Hawkeye is the true romantic and adventurous hero. It seems as if Duncan is only placed in the film as Hawkeye's binary opposite to confirm and enhance Hawkeye's favorable traits. Hawkeye is made into a clear heroic model for male spectators to emulate. They participate in the film and have an active gaze

through Hawkeye's activities. At the same time, Hawkeye is also presented as an image for female spectators to look at and enjoy. In this case, scopophilia is encouraged not through the feminine Duncan, but through the active hero of the film. In the same way, the active heroine of the film is also presented to be looked at enjoyed more so than is her passive female counterpart.

The film presents a second set of binary opposites through Cora and Alice. Cora is active and seems to be crafted to be looked at. Alice is passive and looks so listless that she is ignored. Her function in the film is similar to that of Duncan in that she seems to be present only to counter the positive qualities Cora possesses. For example, the first scene featuring both sisters is the tea party in the meadow. Before Alice arrives, Cora and Duncan discuss their future. Cora takes an active stance as she refuses Duncan's proposal. At the same time, the *mis en scene* is crafted so that Cora possesses the "to-be-looked-at-ness" quality. The light in the scene shines onto Cora's face so that although she wears a hat, she isn't shadowed; her skin is bright and seems to glow. During her interaction with Duncan, Cora looks almost directly at the audience. The camera zooms in and viewers are able to observe that Cora is wearing makeup. Blush, eye shadow, and lipstick have been used to enhance her features, but the makeup is used lightly to appear natural. Cora is framed by the white sheet that hangs on a clothesline in the background and adds even more light to her face. In contrast, to subtly suggest the different worlds of men and women, Duncan's face is framed only by the darkness of the forest trees behind him. The scene is constructed to draw the viewer's eye to Cora.

When Alice enters the scene, her back is turned to the camera. In a medium shot, Alice pauses to greet Duncan and turns slightly so that the audience can see her profile. Then, the camera pulls out to a longer shot and the scene ends with Alice again with her back to the audience. In this scene, Alice is never seen facing forward and she is never featured in any close up shots. The scene is crafted to direct the spectator's gaze toward Cora and away from Alice. In this way, the later adaptation imitates its 1936 predecessor because Cora's power comes at the expense of her weakened sister.

The dialogue of the sisters also demonstrates their contrasting personalities. After Duncan proposes to Cora, she politely refuses him, but at the same time, she expresses her disillusionment with the patriarchy. She tells Duncan that she feels friendship and respect for him. When he counters that this should be a basis for marriage, Cora replies, "Some say that's the way of it: my cousin Eugene, my father." Duncan interrupts her and says, "Why not let those whom you trust, your father, help settle what's best for you? In view of your indecision, you should rely on their judgment and mine." Cora demonstrates a willingness to break away from this traditional patriarchal system in which her father and male friend would make decisions for her. She does not want to merely follow what these men think is best for her, but wishes to follow her own instincts. When Alice appears later in the scene, it is clear that she differs from her sister in this respect. Alice tells Duncan that she cannot wait to begin the journey to return to her father. Duncan tells her, "It can be dangerous." Alice replies, "Nonsense. Papa would not have sent for us." This

remark demonstrates that Alice completely believes in and relies on the traditional patriarchy. Cora questions her father's judgment, but Alice has absolute faith in him, believes he is practically omniscient, and cannot even fathom that he would ever make a mistake or put her in harm's way.

Later while at Fort William Henry, Cora is unable to fight in the battle against the French, and so she takes an active position by working in the fort's surgery. This later scene opens as Cora patches a wound on Uncas' side. She rips bandages, wraps them around Uncas and informs him, "It will seep, but then it's going to draw." Cora demonstrates medical expertise in this scene which shows that she is a strong and active woman. After Cora instructs Uncas on how to properly care for his wound, Hawkeye approaches her. Uncas is quickly taken out of the lovers' tableau and the camera begins to cut back and forth between close-up shots of Cora and Hawkeye.

The audience sees Hawkeye in profile, but fully sees Cora's face as she looks directly at both Hawkeye and the camera. Cora looks at him and asks, "What are you looking at, sir?" Hawkeye coolly replies, "I'm looking at you, miss." When Hawkeye is shown, the camera takes a neutral position; when Cora is shown, the camera takes his perspective, which allows Hawkeye to act as a surrogate for male viewers. At the same time however, both characters are turned into visual spectacles for the audience to enjoy. This is particularly interesting because according to Mulvey, passive female characters are the most likely to be turned into visual spectacles. She writes, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze

projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly” (62). The fact that Cora and Hawkeye are active characters and made into spectacles reduces the voyeuristic ability of audience members. Spectators of both sexes can enjoy the images of Hawkeye and Cora, but are unable to fully control those images because the characters are active. In this way, female spectatorship is enhanced because although female viewers cannot control Hawkeye’s image, they can also identify with Cora and watch as she resists the control of the male gaze by showing that she has agency over her own choices and desires.

Alice’s role in the film continually contrasts the role of Cora and diminishes the female gaze. In a later scene, Duncan enters the sisters’ chambers to speak with Cora about his previous proposal. Cora quiets him and points to Alice who is lying listlessly in bed. Alice awakens and whispers, “Talk to Duncan, Cora. I must manage. I cannot be an invalid schoolgirl.” Alice then shuffles out of the room, leaving Cora and Duncan alone. During this interaction, Cora and Duncan can both be seen clearly by the camera; their faces are lit by the orange glow of the fire. In contrast, when Alice sits up in bed, she turns her face away from the camera. As she stands, her back is turned to the camera and when Alice leaves the room, she looks down at the floor, her hair falls in front of her eyes, and her face is almost entirely in shadows. When Cora is in a scene, the *mis en scene* is crafted to focus on her and the camera asks that audience members become voyeurs. Cora’s image can be seen clearly and the camera’s extended shots almost demand that she be looked at and enjoyed. In contrast, Alice’s image is crafted to be ignored. It is also important that

Cora works in the surgery, while Alice refers to herself as, "an invalid schoolgirl." The filmmakers play with audience expectations by allowing them to look at but not control the healthy and active Cora while at the same time denying them the opportunity to look at or enjoy the passive and sickly Alice. The passive image presented in Alice could be much more easily controlled than would Cora's active image. Yet, the film specifically changes this dynamic so that the woman who is looked at cannot be controlled and the woman who could be controlled is not looked at.

This dynamic is consistent throughout the film. When the British are forced to leave Fort William Henry, they are again attacked by the Huron. Alice cowers with her chin tucked into her chest and is covered by her protective older sister. Cora rushes her sister away to safety and shoots an attacking Huron as Alice stands in shock. This scene is one of the only instances in which Alice looks directly into the eye of the camera and this angle is used only to contrast the actions of Cora. The film first shows a medium shot of Cora standing in front of her sister, looking fiercely into the camera, and firing her gun at the Huron. Powder from her gun explodes into white and then the film cuts to an imitation of that camera angle and shows Alice looking directly into the camera with her mouth hanging open and her eyes glazing over. Alice is unaware that her sister has just saved her life by killing a man. While Cora is proactive in battle, Alice is in complete shock. She is helpless and incapable of protecting herself from attack. By presenting the two sisters as binary opposites, the filmmakers show an awareness of female spectatorship that was not present in the

earlier adaptation. Unlike the 1936 film which successfully removed power from the older Munro sister, this film clearly presents Cora as a woman who becomes increasingly empowered throughout the narrative. The female gaze is enhanced as women are able to identify with Cora and see parts of the film from her perspective. At the same time however, Cora's strengths are undercut by her sister's weaknesses.

In the binary oppositional pairing of Duncan and Hawkeye, the film shows Duncan as he strives to become more strong and active. He fights in battle and in portions of the scenes he occupies, the camera's eye takes his perspective. Duncan's weaknesses are corrected by Hawkeye, but the weaker man never contaminates the stronger. In the film's pairing of Alice and Cora, Alice is never allowed to become the least bit active. The camera never takes her perspective and in half of the scenes which feature Alice, the audience cannot even see her face. The two sisters are closely linked in each scene and Alice weakness contaminates her sister in a way that is similar to the feminine taint of Cora in the 1936 adaptation. This contamination of feminine weakness diminishes the strength of the film's active female gaze.

As the film closes, Cora and Hawkeye remain active and strong characters while both Duncan and Alice die passive deaths. Magua has captured the two sisters and intends on burning Cora alive and keeping Alice as his wife. Duncan and Hawkeye enter the Huron camp and offer themselves as sacrifices in place of the two sisters. The Huron leader accepts Duncan's offer and releases Cora, but forces Alice to leave with Magua as his wife. Cora and Hawkeye watch as Duncan is lifted onto a pyre to be burned alive. Hawkeye takes over control of the scene by shooting the

now completely passive Duncan through the heart so that Duncan will not have to bear the agony of being burned alive.

After Duncan's meek but noble death, Hawkeye, Cora, Uncas, and Chingachgook run through the wooded mountains to rescue Alice. Uncas reaches the party first and is killed by Magua. In the earlier adaptation of the film, the abducted girl (there called Cora, here called Alice) jumped off of the cliff and grasped the hand of Uncas her would be lover as they both died. In the novel, the character who dies is also called Cora and she does not commit suicide at all. When Magua takes her as his wife, she struggles against him. She tells Magua, "I will go no further. Kill me if thou wilt, detestable Huron; I will go no further" (399). Then Uncas surprises Magua and jumps into the middle of the party and Cora is stabbed by one of Magua's men (399). Later, both Cora and Uncas are buried in a large ceremony held by the Delaware tribe (402-4).

In this adaptation, Alice's death is much more passive. Instead of consciously jumping, Alice backs away from Magua as he beckons her toward him with his hand outstretched. Alice then glances down and gently falls backward over the edge of the cliff. The film cuts to a shot from below looking upward so that the camera shows Alice's skirts billowing in the wind. Alice's suicide becomes a somewhat fetishized spectacle and she seems almost graceful as she falls to the earth. After Duncan and Alice die docilely, Chingachgook murders Magua to revenge Uncas' death. The marginal importance of Duncan and Alice is reiterated in the film's final scene. Unlike the large ceremony depicted in the book which honored the Munro sister's

memory, the film depicts a small burial for Uncas attended only by Hawkeye, Cora, and Chingachgook. Neither Alice nor Duncan is ever mentioned. In this way, the men's loss of the active and masculine Uncas takes precedence over Cora's loss of the passive and feminine Duncan and Alice. Chingachgook mourns for his son and says that now his tribe is gone and he is the last of the Mohicans.

The film's final scene draws the audience's gaze back to Cora and Hawkeye. Chingachgook says that the frontier will change and will be no more but at this moment, "The frontier place is for people like my white son [Hawkeye] and his woman and their children." The two lovers kiss and their hair blows in the wind. On the frontier, there is no room for Alice's type of femininity or Duncan's type of passivity. One day, that will change, but for now only active and robust people like Cora and Hawkeye are able to survive. The film suggests that now, Cora and Hawkeye will brave the wilds, will tame the frontier, and will shape the new America.

Both male and female spectators are able to identify with the film's conclusion. There was previously a division between the male and female realms of activity, but it seems that either Cora is strong enough to surpass those boundaries, or that she is able to cross into the male realm with Hawkeye's help. Cora represents a strong female character and the film never fully allows her active image to be controlled by male spectators. However, male spectators can enjoy the spectacle of Cora just as female spectators can enjoy and take pleasure in the spectacle of Hawkeye. In this way, the film deftly negotiates between the gazes of both men and

women and allows audience members of both genders to have a pleasurable viewing experience.

“He Isn’t a Boy. He’s Laurie!” Empowering the Female Gaze in *Little Women*

The 1933 adaptation of *Little Women* has been criticized by scholars such as Kate Ellis for not being faithful to the novel’s feminist principles because it focuses on the domestic scenes of the novel and downplays the earning power of the March women. However, in the article “Life with Marmee: Three Versions,” Ellis herself noted, “In the 1930s when the first film version of the novel came out, feminism was perceived to have run its course and died” (68). Keeping this historical context in mind, it is easy to recognize the fact that the film may have watered down some of the book’s principles in an attempt to bring a weakened form of feminism to a mass audience. Each of the March girls is an active character and because the narrative is structured around the active lives of the sisters, the adaptation becomes one of the earliest female friendship films.

Most of the men in the film take on lesser roles that support rather than surpass the women in the film. This is in part due to the fact that the film was written by both a woman and a man. The 1933 adaptation of *Little Women* was written by Sarah Mason and Victor Heerman, was directed by George Cukor, and stars Katharine Hepburn as Jo March, Joan Bennett as Amy, Frances Dee as Meg, Jean Parker as Beth, and Douglass Montgomery as Laurie. In particular, the character of Laurie is shaped into the dandy type that became popular in the films of the 1930s. This characterization allows Laurie to retain feminine qualities which further contrast Jo’s tomboyish nature. However, while Laurie is secondary to Jo’s developments and

growth, the addition of Professor Bhaer in the second half of the film makes Jo into a more passive and submissive character.

The film seems conflicted over Jo's personality and this conflict becomes apparent through the drastic changes in Hepburn's acting style. Hepburn's portrayal of Jo in the beginning of the film is coarse; she stomps around the sets, speaks quickly and continually shouts, "Christopher Columbus!" When Jo grows older, she becomes more socially graceful, but also gives up her independent spirit. In the second half of the film, the camera lingers on her face; she leans into the scene's lighting, and speaks softly and gently. These changes signify what Laura Mulvey notes is an inability for film heroines to maintain a stable or unified identity. Mulvey writes that the definition of femininity as passivity "leaves women also shifting between the metaphoric opposition 'active' and passive.' The correct road *femininity* leads to increasing repression of 'the active'" ("Afterthoughts" 124). In this film, Jo's identity in this film is fragmented as she is first put into the role of an active heroine and is then shoved into the different role of the passive and feminine girlfriend of Professor Bhaer. Female spectators who are able to identify with Jo and thereby have an active gaze during the first half of the film are left floundering during the film's second half when a more traditional male gaze takes control.

The later adaptation of Alcott's novel is aware of the female gaze and tries to allow female spectators to be active throughout the narrative. The film accomplishes this goal by using camera angles which take the direct perspectives of female characters, voice over narration which allows the film to be told from a woman's

perspective, and a reliance on the female characters to carry the narrative. To enhance the film's strong female gaze and to make the narrative seem more authentic, the filmmakers also bring in material from other writings by Alcott. However, the film fails somewhat by pushing this agenda and changes the original novel by minimizing the domestic role of Marmee and instead focusing on her political beliefs.

One possible reason that the 1994 version of *Little Women* has such a strong female gaze is that it was created by a group of women and therefore, women are able to actively control the eye of the camera. The film was written by Robin Swicord, produced by Denise Di Novi, directed by Gillian Armstrong and stars Winona Ryder as Jo, Trini Alvarado as Meg, Claire Danes as Beth, Kirsten Dunst as a young Amy March, Samantha Mathis as an older Amy March, and Christian Bale as Laurie. The male characters in the film play supporting or secondary roles. The filmmakers rely on the sensitive male archetype which became popularized by films of the 1990s. For example, John Brooke and Professor Bhaer are both soft spoken. In addition, Christian Bale, who plays Laurie, looks somewhat feminine and often uses what would be traditionally thought of as womanly mannerisms. These characterizations enhance an active female spectatorship because the film never allows its male characters to objectify, fetishize, or control its female stars. In this film, men are too sensitive and caring to become scopophilic spectators and are often subject to the gaze of women.

Ryder's performance as Jo is much more nuanced than Hepburn's was in the earlier adaptation. Ryder is relatively consistent throughout the film and does not rely

on shouting or stomping to convey that she is an active and spirited woman. After falling in love with Professor Bhaer, Ryder's Jo seems more adult, but she does not lose her passion, nor does she become entirely submissive. Her identity is unified and stable. The camera often takes Jo's point of view and in this way promotes an active female spectatorship. There are a few times when the camera takes on the perspective of other characters when looking at Jo and in this way, Ryder is put on display. However, men in the film are also put on display and Jo is such a strong and forceful woman that, while the audience is able to take pleasure in watching Ryder, they are never allowed to control her image. In "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema" Mulvey notes that male viewers identify with male stars because these stars are glamorized and representations of their ideal egos (64). In the later version of *Little Women*, female viewers are able to have a strong female gaze because, similar to male movie stars in traditional films, the glamorization of Ryder is not used to create a sexual spectacle for male viewers, but is instead used to allow female viewers to identify with the star as a representation of their ideal egos.

Little Women 1933

The opening scene of the film shows Marmee working in the Christian Commission of Concord.¹³ After establishing an historical and moral tone with this brief scene, the film transitions into four short vignettes which depict the trials of each of the four March sisters. The scenes are derived from the fourth chapter of Alcott's novel in which the personal burden of each sister is described. The film's first and shortest vignette shows Meg saying goodbye to the King children before going home for the day. Meg is motherly and kisses the children goodbye telling them, "Merry Christmas! Remember, Santa Claus is watching you." The next vignette is longer and features Jo reading to a dozing Aunt March. The film depicts Jo as a mischievous and tomboy and Aunt March as a dour old maid. When Jo tries to sneak away once her aunt has fallen asleep, Aunt March catches her and informs Jo that Mr. March is neglecting his duties by going off to war and is not taking care of his family financially. Jo angrily responds, "We don't need taking care of!" Then, when Aunt March reprimands Jo for not dusting the staircase, Jo waits until the older woman's back is turned before sliding down the banister and hopping out the door. The third vignette is also several minutes long and shows Amy at school as she is lectured by her teacher. Amy cries to her teacher and begs him to forgive her for

¹³ According to Bruce Chadwick, women in Civil War films are often portrayed as either mothers without romantic needs or young over-sexed girls waiting for the return of their men (64). It is interesting to note that this scene, Marmee does not fit into either of these female archetypal patterns. This breaking of convention allows female spectators more control over the gaze of the film. For more information regarding these archetypes and trends in Civil War films, see Bruce Chadwick's *The Reel Civil War*.

making fun of him. Amy then leaves his room, quickly wipes away her tears, and changes her demeanor to criticize the more wealthy girls in her class. The final vignette is shorter and shows Beth sitting at home in front of the piano while playing with a basket of kittens.

Several purposes are fulfilled through this short sequence of scenes. To begin with, the film is able to quickly establish the different personalities of the four sisters. The audience can see that Meg is motherly, Jo is spirited, Amy is a bit snobbish, and Beth is a homebody. However, unlike the one dimensional Munro sisters of the *Last of the Mohicans* films, the four March sisters are not merely archetypes, but fully fleshed out characters. The qualities of the four sisters demonstrated here will influence their lives as they mature into adulthood. Meg will use her mothering skills as a wife and mother. Jo will need her active spirit to find independence and sell her writing. Amy learns to refine her social skills for her role as the wife of an upper-class gentlemen and Beth ventures outside the home to befriend Mr. Laurence and care for the Hummels.

Also of importance is the fact that here, the film also establishes the financial situation of the March family and shows the financial contributions of the two older girls. The first vignette of Meg comes immediately after Marmee's comment that her girls are a comfort to her and that Jo and Meg are now employed. Therefore, when Meg is shown kissing children, it is quite clear that these children are not her own and that, while she may enjoy them, she is also forced to care for them for the sake of her family. When Jo is shown reading to her aunt, it is clear that she does not enjoy her

job, but suffers through it for her family's financial benefit. It is also apparent that, rather than sitting as her aunt's passive companion, Jo desires to be an active child who slides down banisters, writes stories, and rehearses plays.

The financial contributions of the two girls are again stressed when Aunt March gives Jo five dollars and declares, "Don't thank me, just spend it wisely, that's all I ask. Although that's more than I can expect if you're much like your father; waltzing off to war and letting other folks look after his family." Jo does not refute her aunt's claim that Mr. March is bad with money, but instead, declares that her family of five women is economically self sufficient and does not "need taking care of." Even though she is a woman, Aunt March has more economic power than does Jo's father. In addition, even though they are women, and relatively young, Meg and Jo support their family financially during their father's absence and even later when he returns. This idea of working for the family allows women like Meg and Jo to work outside of the home without being socially maligned.

While this aspect of the film is consistent with the book, it is a feature of the novel which is not emphasized as a matter of importance in later cinematic adaptations. Therefore in this adaptation, female spectatorship is supported through the economic independence and activity of the film's main characters. Laura Mulvey argued that male heroes of film represent male spectators' fantasies of, "the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror" ("Visual Pleasure" 64). In *Little Women*, female spectators can identify with Jo and Meg as more perfect and complete images of their

own egos. Through Jo and Meg, women spectators are able to think about supporting themselves or their families through both traditional and non-traditional careers.

The vignettes also establish the narrative within the tradition of early women's films. In her book *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films*, Karen Hollinger writes that:

Films portraying group friendships typically revolve around three or more friends who represent different female life choices. In the films of the 1930s and 1940s, these choices center on the conflict between marriage and career or the conflict between love and money (36).

Hollinger goes on to argue that in films of this time period, a heroine's ultimate choice involved love and marriage; this choice of love over career reinforced the values of the patriarchy. The film *Little Women* follows this mode, in part, because of the constrictions of the novel, which ends with Jo, Meg, and Amy all happily married. Alcott herself found difficulties with this ending and wrote, "Jo should have remained a literary spinster, but so many enthusiastic young ladies wrote me that she should marry Laurie, or somebody, that I didn't dare to refuse and out of perversity went and made a funny match for her" (qtd. in Englund 205). While, in some ways, the ultimate choices of Jo, Meg, and Amy do reflect the values of the patriarchy, the story also incorporates the different lifestyles of women, and the importance of women's economic power. Kate Ellis noted that the 1949 version of Alcott's novel served mainly as a vehicle for its stars and oversimplified the different personalities of each sister (68). In contrast, the 1933 film stresses the sisters' diverse identities as well as

their economic influences. Therefore, this early adaptation gives more power to the active gaze of female spectators because women in the audience are able to embrace and identify with the active identities of one or more the March sisters.

The men in the film are not as active as the women, but instead are either marginalized in the narrative or take on feminine attributes. For example, Douglass Montgomery, who plays Laurie, is crafted by the filmmakers to be the feminine dandy character type which was made popular in the films of the 1930s. In his article "Decadent Heroes: Dandyism and Masculinity in Art Deco Hollywood," Drew Todd explains that dandified men were extremely wealthy and would often appear overly feminine or snobbish. Todd writes, "His former homosexual overtones were inverted and made to seem alluring to the opposite sex. The Deco dandy may have appeared stereotypically gay in many regards, but he was ultimately heterosexual" (168). Todd goes on to write that Hollywood often created a context for the dandy by placing these effeminate men in films with modern and powerful female characters (175). In this way, a dandy hero of the 1930s was allowed to be effeminate and heterosexual at the same time which counter balanced the masculine strength of a film's heterosexual female heroine. The filmmakers capitalize on this popular characterization by emphasizing Douglass Montgomery's feminine characteristics and placing him in scenes with a masculinized Katharine Hepburn. The first scene that features Douglass Montgomery does not occur until a half hour into the film. The filmmakers accentuate Douglass Montgomery's feminine facial features and mannerisms. Montgomery has a long thin face, a slim nose, large eyes, and wavy blond hair. His

lips and eyes are exaggerated with stage makeup; he wears dark eye shadow, blush, lipstick and either eye liner or mascara. Montgomery's frame is extremely thin and has almost no discernible muscle tone. His slight figure corresponds with the ideal dandy who was associated with the upper class and who often had little muscle tone due to their reputations as idle gentlemen.

This scene begins when Jo enters the Laurence household to bring gifts to Laurie because he has been ill. She brings cheese from Meg and gives instructions to Laurie on how to eat it without further injuring his sore throat. In this interaction, Jo speaks with all the authority of a physician, while Laurie looks at her incredulously. The camera constantly switches between the two friends and by doing so, shows that Jo contrasts Laurie in figure and demeanor. Laurie titters, speaks with a high lilting voice, and wears a short suit with a bow tie that accentuates his feminine and childish nature. He walks slowly and handles the teapot delicately. Jo guffaws, yells "Christopher Columbus," stomps around the room, and talks quickly using an affected deep voice.

As the scene continues, the filmmakers continue to play with audience expectations regarding gender roles. When Jo and Laurie sit down to tea, it is Laurie who is genteel in his manners. Jo tries to ask Laurie about his experiences in Europe, but Laurie changes the subject and begins to talk of the March's idyllic home life. While speaking of his neighbors' domestic bliss, he giggles and looks starry eyed into the camera. At this point, Laurie's face is turned directly toward the audience and the camera zooms in to a close-up shot that focuses on his face alone. While Laurie

speaks in this frame, he is put on display so that the audience can see his delicate features and slight figure. The camera also shows a basket of Beth's kittens playing behind Laurie. His image is softened by the kittens and by the fire that lights his face. The camera then switches to a close-up shot of Jo, but this shot does not last as long as Laurie's close-up and Jo is turned slightly to the side as she talks earnestly and leans over her plate. In this way, Jo's image is not as easily manipulated as is Laurie's. When Laurie was in the close-up shot, the camera lingered on his face and he spoke softly and dreamily. When the camera changed and focused on Jo, she continued to speak quickly in a low voice.

By showing these two contrasting close-up shots, the filmmakers are trying to reinforce the idea that Jo is self-conscious about acting masculine and Laurie is her more feminine male counterpart. When the camera closes in on Laurie, it takes Jo's exact perspective because Douglass' face is flush with the camera. During Jo's close-up, Hepburn's face and body are turned a quarter of the way away from the camera. When showing Jo, the camera does not take an entirely neutral perspective as it does during the medium shots of the two friends' profiles during their conversation. However, Jo's close-up is not shown entirely from Laurie's perspective either. Since Jo's image is not shown from a male perspective, she is not passively put on display as Laurie is. In this way, an attempt is made to reach the "modern" female spectator. The film allows women to look at, enjoy, and control the attractive and passive image of Laurie. It also allows women to look at the scene through Jo's eyes and identify

with Jo's more active or masculine traits. Therefore, in this part of the scene, male spectatorship is suppressed in favor of an active female spectatorship.

Todd claims that an integral part of the dandy image is a constant or blatant assertion of his heterosexuality. Laurie's heterosexuality is reasserted in the next segment of this scene, when the two friends begin to pretend to sword fight as if they are in one of Jo's plays. While playing this game, both become rowdy and take no notice when Laurie's tutor and grandfather enter the room. The camera cuts back and forth between the swordfight and the shocked faces of John Brooke and the elder Mr. Laurence. This editing establishes that both Laurie and Jo are being seen from the perspective of the two older men. While the camera's eye substitutes for the men's gaze when looking at Jo and Laurie, a neutral gaze is taken when the camera shows a medium shot of the two men as they act as unseen voyeurs. The male spectator, suppressed in the beginning of the scene, is now able to control the images on screen. Although both friends are being watched, it is Jo who will be put on display under their gaze. As the two friends fight, Laurie moves in and pretends to stab Jo which causes her to trip and fall backwards. When Jo falls, her hoop skirt flies up over her head so that the voyeurs can see her petticoat and her bloomers. The camera cuts away to show the two older men looking sternly upon the scene and then cuts back to Jo as she struggles to sit up. In order to help her, Laurie reaches up underneath her petticoat and pulls her skirts down over the hoops of her dress. He then remarks, "I'm sorry. I forgot you were a girl and I'm afraid I got too rough."

After falling, Jo protests that she and not Laurie was winning the fight, but her protests are in vain and any power she had accrued in the previous part of the scene has now been taken away from her. Laurie has proven his heterosexuality first by winning the sword fight and then by looking at and touching Jo's undergarments. Jo was previously a powerful character, and the camera was able to act as a substitute for her gaze. After her fall, she ceases to be a strong woman and instead becomes merely a silly girl who enjoys showing off her underwear. When Jo's power is taken away in this portion of the scene, she is put on display and therefore, the film's active female spectatorship is also taken away. Since the scene is shot from an entirely male perspective, it enhances male spectatorship and female viewers are reminded that although Laurie is a refined and wealthy dandy, he is also a man and therefore, in some ways, he is more powerful than Jo.

Even though male spectatorship dominated the end of this scene, Jo's personality remains active throughout the first half of the film. In the second half of the film, Jo's identity changes, she is put on display for male viewers, and she becomes more passive. Kate Ellis observes:

For Hepburn, this boyish image changes dramatically [...] she suddenly becomes (such is the transforming power of the right man) the subject of dreamy, soft-focus-close-ups [...] From being Hepburn the tomboy she suddenly becomes, under Cukor's loving direction, Hepburn the star (70).

Ellis states that the appearance of Professor Bhaer as the reason for the change in Jo's demeanor. In actuality, the change is a bit more gradual than Ellis believes and occurs before Jo moves to New York and meets the professor. Jo's identity begins to change and fragment during the scene when Beth first becomes ill with scarlet fever. Previous to this point, Hepburn has stomped through scenes, talked out of the side of her mouth and feigned a low, fast-paced mannish voice. When Jo believes that Beth is dying, her face and mannerisms change.

The scene begins with Laurie and Jo sitting in the attic and speaking about Beth's fragile condition. Laurie leaves to fetch Marmee from the train station and the camera then focuses on Jo as she begins to come down the attic stairs and pauses at the top of the stairway.¹⁴ When Jo pauses and kneels down to pray, the camera zooms in to show her face; light shines onto her eyes while the rest of her face remains in shadow. While her eyes are lit, Jo raises her gaze to Heaven and prays to God that he will not take Beth away from them. When Jo prays, the coarse tones previously forced into her voice fade away. She speaks softly, gently, and her voice becomes much higher than it was before. Her hands shake and she grasps the staircase dramatically. Although Jo is put on display in this scene, female spectatorship is still able to be active. The narrative continues to focus on Jo's actions, and much of the story is still from her perspective. At the same time

¹⁴ This scene almost exactly mimics the 1928 version of *Les Passion de Jeanne de Arc*. In that film, Joan's hair has just been cut and she falls on her knees to pray to God regarding the voices she has been hearing. The camera pans in to a close-up shot of Ingrid Bergman's face and the light is focused on her eyes while the rest of her face is in darkness. The resemblances of this scene with the scene of Jo in *Little Women* are remarkable. Not only the lighting is the same, but it is especially noticeable that Jo's hair is cut and she kneels to pray just as Joan of Arc did in the earlier film.

however, male spectators are able to take voyeuristic pleasure in watching Jo's image during this scene in a way that they were unable to previously in the scenes where she was merely a tomboy.

After Beth recovers, the narrative refocuses on Meg and Jo reverts back to being a tomboy as she protests her sister's courtship with John Brooke. When Jo begs her sister not to "marry that man," her identity fragments again.¹⁵ Jo's final transitions from adolescence to adulthood begin after Meg and John's wedding when Laurie proposes to Jo and she refuses him. After being rejected, Laurie and Jo switch roles. Now actively masculine, Laurie shouts and runs away; then, the camera shows Jo, now more passive and feminine, standing silently and grasping onto the post of a bridge. In this scene, Jo and Laurie switch roles so that he becomes more active and she becomes civilized and feminine. The scene fades to black and then fades back in to show Jo that night, standing in her nightdress while grasping onto a chair in her bedroom. It is at this point that Jo's full transition occurs; her childhood fades out and her adulthood comes into focus.

When shown alone in her room, Jo's costume makes Hepburn look extremely modern; she turns from a Civil War era girl into a modern woman of the 1930s. Her short hair is worn down and supposed to look natural; in reality it has been curled to look a bit tousled while still framing her face. Jo wears a plain nightdress which

¹⁵ Part of the reason that Jo is unable to establish a stable identity lies in the fact that Hepburn was 26 when the film was produced. It seems that both filmmakers and Hepburn did not know how to make a 26 year old woman act like a 15 year old girl at the beginning of the film. The film first solves this problem by accentuating Jo's tomboyish traits at the expense of her more feminine characteristics. Then, after using over an hour of the film to establish Hepburn as a masculine adolescent, the filmmakers then need to show that Jo is growing up and becoming a woman. To do this, Hepburn has to drop her tomboy mannerisms, act softer, and become more ladylike.

looks almost stylish. Like a woman's blouse of the 30s or 40s, it has long sleek sleeves, cuffs, and a Peter Pan collar. When Marmèe, dressed in a hoopskirt, walks into the room to wish her daughter goodnight, Hepburn's hairstyle and costume look strangely anachronistic.

Throughout the scene, Hepburn retains the distinctive "to-be-looked-at-ness." The active female spectatorship established earlier in the film is pushed aside as Jo ceases to be active and is put on display for male viewers. It is at this point that Jo turns into, as Ellis noted, "Hepburn the star" (70). The camera lingers on Hepburn's face in extended close-ups and she becomes the center of attention even in the medium shots. When Byington enters the room, Hepburn is seated on the windowsill. As they talk, Byington's back faces the camera so that she cannot fully capture the audience's gaze. In contrast, Hepburn is shown in profile, but often turns her face toward the camera. When Hepburn moves off of the window sill and approaches the bed, both women face each other and their profiles are shown. Then, Hepburn again turns her face toward the camera and as she gets into bed, the camera follows her movements and focuses in on her face for an extended close-up. When the close-up ends, Hepburn lies in bed, Byington kisses her goodnight, and the scene fades to black. After the scene ends, the film fades in to show Jo speaking with her employer in New York City. Both the camera angles and faded transitions reinforce the fact that Jo is growing up. In her bedroom, the film displays Jo as a growing sexualized woman and then, after Marmèe kisses her daughter goodnight, a fully adult Jo is able to emerge in the next scene.

The changes in Jo's personality become more apparent when she moves to New York. In the novel, Jo and Professor Bhaer bond over books and the Kirke children. At one point, Jo writes that she felt sorry for Bhaer because he was becoming frustrated while trying to instruct two young ladies in German. Jo notes that the two girls kept, "laughing affectedly" and speaking in "coquettish tones" while Bhaer tried to correct their grammar (Alcott 308). Later, Bhaer gave Jo the precious gift of "a fine Shakespeare" a book which he, "valued very much" (315). Through their intellectual interactions, the two bonded over a long period of time. This cinematic version of Alcott's novel drastically changes their relationship.

In a scene shortly after her first meeting with Professor Bhaer, Jo is shown sewing in soft lighting as the professor plays the piano. The camera moves in to show Jo's face looking into the distance as she listens to Bhaer sing; then, the camera follows Jo as she moves from the parlor into the music room and asks the professor to resume playing. When Jo speaks to Bhaer, her voice is soft and her words come slowly. She glides over to him and leans her body into his as they talk. This is in great contrast to the Jo who slumped and stomped in her scenes with Laurie. When Bhaer begins to play another song, Jo is put on display for male audience members. She gracefully leans across the piano and the soundtrack adds softly playing violins to the song. Bhaer translates the words from the original German and says, "My senses fail. A burning fire devours me." As the languishing Jo repeats him, her chest heaves, she bats her eye lashes, and she gazes at him dreamily. During this interaction, Jo falls in love and her transformation into a woman is complete.

Ellis argues that Jo is transformed in the film because of the power of the “right man” (70). This is partially true as Jo does not fully become a woman until this scene with Bhaer. However, at the same time, Ellis’s argument is somewhat oversimplified. Jo grows up during the course of the film because she has seen Beth at the point of death and has watched Meg start a new life. Jo’s life experiences have caused her to become a softer, wiser and more serious woman. The filmmakers have shown her growth process by taking away her tomboyish tendencies and replacing them with graceful movements, glamorous clothes, and soft gentle words. The tragedy is that while trying to make Jo more adult, the filmmakers make her more feminine and their definition of what it means to be feminine includes passivity and exhibition. To make Jo into a tomboy, the filmmakers have Hepburn stomp, shove food into her mouth, and talk quickly in a low voice. These clichéd mannerisms become annoying at times, but they simultaneously allow Jo’s energetic, ambitious, and lively spirit to be shown as well. As an adolescent, Jo is allowed to romp with her friends and sisters, to earn money, and to sacrifice for her family. In return, the camera is able to take her perspective and allows female spectators to have an active gaze. When Jo transforms into a woman, she is no longer allowed to romp, play, or have any excess of energy. Instead, she becomes passive and is put on display. In return, the camera takes a male perspective and suppresses the previously active female gaze. The message of the film seems to be that it is fine for girls to be energetic and active, but sooner or later, they must grow up and become passive women who have to act gently and look pretty for the men they will eventually marry.

In the first half of the film, the filmmakers are aware of the fact that their movie will be primarily seen by a female audience. They play with gender roles and stereotypes throughout the film, but in the end succumb to the ideals of the age. To cater to this audience, they at first allow Jo to be an active and energetic character. They create a Jo who is at first somewhat active, but whose personality becomes increasingly fragmented throughout the second half of the film so that in the end, she becomes fully feminine by being fully passive.

The film presents different types of women including those who have economic power. It also presents male characters who have feminine traits. However, the end of the film contrasts the first half by supporting the traditional patriarchal system and undermining unconventional female roles. By doing so, the female spectators who have an active gaze during the first part of the film are left floundering when an active male spectatorship takes power away from them at the close of the film.

Little Women 1994

The later adaptation of Alcott's novel was written, directed and produced by a team of women. The sense that the narrative will be a "women's film" is apparent beginning with the opening lines of the movie which are spoken by Jo through voiceover narration. In her essay "In Jo's Garret," Sue Standing writes, "For many readers of *Little Women*, the core scenes include those in which Jo finds refuge in the garret where she 'loved to retire with a half a dozen russets and a nice book'" (178). Standing goes on to say that Jo's garret is a space inhabited only by women and is therefore empowering for many female readers (179).

The filmmakers of the 1994 adaptation embrace this empowering women's space found in the novel. The space is used to introduce the film; the narrative begins through Jo's voice while she sits in the attic scribbling stories and recalling the memories of her childhood. In the DVD's feature length commentary, director Gillian Armstrong says that the narration is used to establish Jo's active voice in the film. She states, "Jo's voice is a very strong voice in the book. It is a first person voice and so we thought it was appropriate to add to the film." The narration is used to introduce not only Jo's voice, but also the film's other female characters, its historical setting, and other major themes such as economics and domestic life. Jo says:

My sisters and I remember that winter as the coldest of our childhood.

A temporary poverty had settled on our family some years before. The

war had made fuel and lamp oil scarce [...] yet somehow in that dark time our family, the March family, seemed to create its own light.

Jo decides which memories will be highlighted or suppressed; she also controls all of the images that the audience sees. The filmmakers are aware of the female spectators who are watching the film. By opening with Jo's first person narration in a space inhabited by her alone, the film allows the story to be told from a woman's point of view. In this way, the film establishes both an active female spectatorship and authorship.

Unlike the 1933 film, which was somewhat influenced by the backlash against the first wave of feminism, the women who created this adaptation were influenced by feminism's second wave and the dynamic changes it brought to Western culture. By using Jo's words to simultaneously tell the story from a woman's perspective and speak lovingly about the March family, the filmmakers make it apparent that family and domesticity are not antithetical to feminism. In this way, the film establishes the fact that family and feminism are not mutually exclusive concepts.

At the same time however, to magnify the feminist message of the film, the narrative eliminates much of the moral education which took place in the March home of Alcott's novel. For example, in the novel, Mr. March's letter to his girls emphasized the work that the girls could perform in his absence. He writes that they should be loving children, "do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves beautifully so that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women" (Alcott 10). In the novel, after

Marmee reads his letter, each of the girls names her sins and vows to conquer them. The earlier film left this dialogue intact, but this adaptation completely changes the scene. Here, the letter from Mr. March ends with, "Give them all my love and a kiss. Tell them I think of them by day and pray for them by night." Only Amy responds to the sentiments of the letter and says, "I'm a selfish girl." Her words are practically meaningless because of the changes to Mr. March's letter. This insignificance is reinforced with Marmee's response. Instead of giving her daughter moral instruction on how to overcome her selfishness, Marmee responds to Amy by smiling, kissing her on the forehead, and murmuring the comforting words, "Oh, little one." The scene demonstrates that the March sisters' ideal home life does not include moral guidance from either parent. The explicit exclusion of "my little women" in their father's letter is an attempt by the filmmakers to work against the traditional patriarchal structure by undermining the importance of the father in the March home.

The change made to this scene is also an attempt to soften the moral lessons of a nineteenth-century novel for a modern audience. In her article "Filming the Nineteenth Century: The *Secret Garden* and *Little Women*," Shirley Marchalonis notes the removal of the *Pilgrim's Progress* theme from the novel's 1994 film adaptation and states that this removal also causes the film to abandon the moral courage and strength which comprise one of the novel's main themes. Marchalonis writes that in the novel *Little Women*, each of the four girls has to overcome a sin which acts as a barrier to becoming a mature woman, but "In the recent film, the underlying message is that love solves everything, a message that the late twentieth

century finds acceptable" (284). Marcholonis' observations are accurate to a point. It is true that the cinematic Marmee is never allowed to fully articulate the character building lessons found in Alcott's novel. At the same time however, the film does place emphasis on Marmee as a moral champion for the equal rights of women. When speaking of women's rights, Marmee is quick to give moral lectures and advice. For example, when Marmee meets John Brooke, the tutor meekly comments on how active her younger daughters are. Mrs. March swiftly replies, "It is my opinion that young girls are no different than boys in their need for exertion. Feminine weakness and fainting spells are the direct result of our confining young girls to the house bent over their needlework in restrictive corsets." With this speech, Marmee is able to have courage and strength; she becomes a strong morally indignant feminist with a bit of an acid tongue. In this way, the film changes the original novel in an attempt to support a female gaze and give female spectators the message that they can be active and vocal.¹⁶

Marmee's speech to John and similar speeches cause the filmmakers' political views or agendas to overshadow Alcott's larger message and narrative concerns which focus on the sins or burdens of the four girls and the ways in which they conquer these burdens as they grow and become women. While Marmee's views do help to enhance the film's strong female gaze in some ways, in other ways the speech could alienate some viewers. It sacrifices domesticity and ethical lessons and in

¹⁶ It should be noted that the idea of corset restrictions can be found in Alcott's novel *Eight Cousins*. In that novel, several characters are debating over the wearing of corsets and Dr. Alec explains the health risks of the corset while looking at it with, "The expression one would wear on beholding the thumbscrews or the rack of ancient times" (*Eight Cousins* 169).

doing so, shoves political ideology into the midst of the charming narrative. In this way, the film fails to successfully negotiate between the gazes of male and female viewers. Male viewers are not able to have an active gaze. Instead, in this scene, they are shoved aside and somewhat ridiculed. While female spectators are able to feel Marmee's love for her daughters in other scenes, in this scene, they are almost forced to feel Marmee's indignation with the patriarchy. In this way, while male spectators are considered outsiders, female spectators not only have an active gaze, but are also included as members of the March family.

The characterization of the male characters in the film also serves to enhance the active gaze of female viewers. Throughout the film, the camera often looks at Laurie from one of the March sister's perspectives. For example, in an early scene, Laurie sits in his house and he is watched by the March sisters from their attic window. Amy stares at him and says, "We will all grow up one day. We might as well know what we want." This scene foreshadows the romance which takes place between Amy and Laurie later in the film, and is specifically from Amy's young female perspective instead of from Laurie's older male perspective. Amy is thinking about what she wants in life and becomes a voyeur while she stares at the object of her affection; the camera literally takes her point of view so that Laurie is gazed at with Amy's eyes.

In addition to looking at male characters with a female gaze, the film also plays with gender expectations through the casting of Christian Bale as Laurie and the crafting of his image to look somewhat feminine in the beginning of the film. In the

scene at the ball when Laurie and Jo talk through the series of close-ups, it becomes apparent that they are equals. Part of this equality is based on the fact that the Bale looks similar to Winona Ryder who plays Jo. Both have similar coloring, long oval faces, slim noses, and large brown eyes. Ryder's long dark brown hair is pulled back, making it almost the same length as Bale's similarly wavy, shoulder length, and dark brown hair. Their similarities create an androgynous effect so that Jo looks a bit more masculine, and Laurie looks a bit more feminine. Laurie's feminine qualities are reaffirmed later in the scene when Jo returns home and informs Amy of their new friendship. Amy says, "We're going to be friends with a boy?" Jo replies, "He isn't a boy. He's Laurie." With this comment, Jo invalidates Laurie's masculinity and places him in a position equal to one of her sisters.¹⁷

In her article, "The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties," Susan Jeffords explains that in the 1990s, the roles of men in films changed drastically. She writes that in the nineties, callous male action stars were replaced by sensitive and caring male characters (197). The film's image of Laurie fits into this mold of the new, more sensitive 90s man. He is no longer a dandy who eats daintily while constantly concerned with material excesses. The Laurie of this scene with Jo stammers a bit, talks softly and has the gentle spirit of a Bohemian musician. He is able to express his emotions and articulate his most cherished hopes and dreams when talking to Jo. He tells her about his passion for music and how he regrets that his

¹⁷ It is important to note that, even at this stage in the film, Amy never considers Laurie a girl, but holds his masculinity in higher esteem than does her older sister. Later, it will be Amy who helps Laurie to reclaim his masculinity when they fall in love and marry. Instead of becoming enveloped in a feminine role, Laurie asserts himself as part of the family and becomes Jo's brother instead of her sister.

grandfather wants him to be tutored so that he can attend college and eventually go into business. Laurie is also able to be extremely compassionate when he first meets Meg. Meg sprains her ankle and Laurie looks down at her with concern, helps her with her ankle, and then offers to take the girls home. At the same time, he is also capable of change and is able to switch from being compassionate with Meg to romping and playing with Jo and Amy in the next scene.

Eric Stoltz, who plays the part of John Brooke, is also a sensitive 90s man. He has a thin slight frame with almost no muscle tone and often seems shaky and unsure of his movements. He speaks slowly and quietly as if he is insecure when addressing women. Brooke is very much concerned with chivalry and treats all of the women in the film gently and kindly. For example, during one scene, Brooke is in the midst of tutoring Laurie when the younger boy leans out of his window and shouts to Jo and Meg, "Come over. It's dull as tombs over here!" Brooke scolds him saying, "Mr. Laurence! One does not shout at ladies as if they were cattle." Brooke then looks out toward Meg, shakily lifts the window, blinks rapidly, and stammers, "My apologies." This characterization of Brooke is much like Jefford's description of the 90s man who is a "sensitive, loving, nurturing, protective family man" (197). The film values a form of masculinity much different than the 1992 version of *Last of the Mohicans*. Brooke is not the rough, muscular, hard-fighting man of the 1980s. Instead, he is mild mannered, kind, sensitive, and at all times gentle when protecting the feelings of women.

The characterization of both Laurie and John Brooke as sensitive nurturing men helps to further establish the active gaze of female spectators. In the film, Jo is an active character and the camera is able to take her exact perspective and look through her eyes. The camera also looks through Laurie's eyes, and he is an active character, but he is never able to take over the gaze of the film. Jo is never made passive or turned into a spectacle in front of Laurie's eyes, and although Meg is seen from John's perspective, he is also seen through her eyes. The gaze is mutual, and while both John and Laurie are attractive, they are never turned into passive spectacles displayed for the pleasure of female audience members. By crafting the characters of John and Laurie into sensitive men, the film allows the female characters of the film to remain active and independent. Jo, Meg, and the older Amy are never forced to become passive characters who stop acting for themselves and exist only to react to the men in the film. Jo and Amy are able to be strong active women because Laurie is sensitive and compassionate. Similarly, John's gentle disposition allows Meg to be more than just a submissive woman who is an object for the gaze of the patriarchy. Both men are loving, compassionate, and gently protective; therefore, they don't overpower the women of the film and because of this, the male spectator's gaze is never able to overpower the female gaze of the film.

To support and empower the gaze of female spectators, the filmmakers make a distinctly critical statement against situations where women are put on display. This critique takes place during the scene in which Meg attends Sallie Moffat's coming out party. During the party scene, the camera shows Laurie moving through a crowd and

then focuses on Meg as she is seen from Laurie's point of view. Meg is wearing a low cut silk dress which draws attention to her breasts and cleavage. She is also wearing heavy makeup including lipstick, eye shadow, and blush. Laurie sees Meg drinking champagne and giggling coquettishly while flirting with a group of four men. When Laurie approaches her, Meg looks shocked as if she has been caught doing something wrong. Laurie first reprimands her for drinking when her family supports the temperance movement. He then pulls her away from the group and Meg puts a gloved hand over her chest in embarrassment. Laurie whispers to her, "Don't cover up now. There may be one or two gentlemen here who haven't seen your charms and I did promise Jo I would show you off." Meg looks embarrassed, but tries to defend herself and says, "The girls dressed me up and I rather like it." Laurie realizes that she is acting and whispers, "Yes, well it *reveals* a whole new Meg." He leans over and brushes his hand against the lace which lines the top of her gown and asks, "What do you call this?" Meg runs away and the next shot is an extreme close-up focusing only on Meg's mouth as she cries and wipes away her lipstick. When Laurie joins her, Meg apologizes for her behavior and tells him that she was only playing a part to see what it felt like to be a socialite like Belle Gardner. Laurie tells her, "You're worth ten of those other girls." Two women pass and comment that Meg has been throwing herself at "the Laurence heir" and Laurie and Meg laugh as their friendship is again secured.

It is particularly important in this scene that Laurie and not Jo, Marmee, or another female character expresses displeasure at the fact that Meg is putting herself

on display. If Jo scolded Meg for wearing the dress, the reprimand would only serve to further establish Jo as a tomboy who is reluctant to grow up. If Marmee scolded Meg, her reprimand would only serve to further establish Marmee as a proponent for women's rights. Since Laurie scolds Meg as a concerned friend and sensitive man, his words seem to carry more weight so that it is easier for Meg to see her error. Laurie has been established by the movie as a sensitive man, and the film seems to be telling female viewers that "nice guys" wouldn't want women to put themselves on display. A nice guy would want to associate with a woman because of her personality or intelligence—not because of her physical attributes.

In addition, the scene deliberately breaks the pattern of traditional films in which women characters are put on display for the pleasure of male characters. In "Visual Pleasure," Mulvey proposes that this tradition allows women to become spectacles for male audience members to control and enjoy (62). To reverse this process, the film first has Meg made into a spectacle at the hands of other women. It is Meg's female friends and not her lover or male friend who turn her from a demure girl into a sexually fetishized spectacle. The film allows Laurie to see Meg fetishized in a tight fitting low-cut dress wearing heavy makeup and then shows Laurie's taking distinct displeasure in the display he sees. Meg's flirtatious spectacle is displeasing to the male eye. Through Laurie's reproachful words, the audience is also able to understand that Meg's spectacle would be even more displeasing to the female members of her family. In this way, male spectators are given the message that women do not have to be sexual or fetishized for their pleasure. Female viewers are

given the message that they should demonstrate intelligence and uphold their morals as Meg did before changing her appearance. Women in the audience are also reassured that they do not have to be put on visual display for men to find them attractive or interesting.

Jo is not put on display in this way, but instead remains an active character throughout the film. Ryder's interpretation of Jo's transition to womanhood is much more nuanced than Hepburn's performance was in the earlier adaptation. When Jo first interacts with Professor Bhaer, they seem to meet on an intellectual level and are portrayed as equals. Instead of becoming passive and submissive in the "hands of the right man" as the Jo of the 1933 film does, here Jo blossoms into womanhood by retaining her activity and liveliness while becoming just a bit softer and more adult. In the scene in which Jo's romance begins, she literally runs into Bhaer after one of her stories is rejected by a publisher. Her papers fall into a puddle and Bhaer helps her gather them together and the camera then cuts away to show Jo in his room drying her stories over his fire. Here, Jo's personality doesn't completely transform into divisive fragments. Instead, her positive qualities seem to be enhanced because she is in Bhaer's presence. She asks him about his library and they stand next to each other looking lovingly at a volume of Shakespeare. Jo remarks that, "Some books are so familiar that reading them is like being home again." Jo then tells Bhaer that her father used to read German poetry to her and says that her parents were part of the Transcendentalist movement in Concord. Bhaer responds to her with enthusiasm and says, "But this is German romantic philosophy! We throw out all our constraints and

we come to know ourselves through insight and experience!” The two then talk of Transcendentalist philosophy and the theme of love conquering all is again reinforced as Bhaer remarks, “If only we could transcend ourselves without trying to reach perfection.”

As Jo and Bhaer speak, the professor’s room is visible in the background. The walls of the room are covered with dark brown wallpaper and old torn books cover the tables and floor. A dirty tilted mirror surrounded by a gold frame hangs on the back wall. The room is lit by the orange glow of a fire which adds to the warm tone of the scene. Jo wears a tan dress and Bhaer is dressed in a dark brown suit. The earth tones of the characters’ clothing, Bhaer’s books, and the room’s décor all blend together. In the same way, Jo’s personality seems to blend in with Bhaer’s.

Instead of changing Jo into a passive wifely figure, Bhaer acts as her equal and his personality complements rather than overshadows hers. This fact is reinforced by Jo’s voiceover at the end of the scene. The camera shows Beth reading a letter from her sister while Jo’s voice narrates, “He is as poor as one might imagine an itinerant philosopher to be. Yet, as the weeks go by, I see that he is unfailingly generous to all of us who live in the house. I am grateful to have a friend.” During the narration, the film cuts away from Beth and shows Jo standing on a staircase. The camera then takes Jo’s perspective as she watches Professor Bhaer play with the Kirke children. In this way, the film demonstrates that Jo’s voice and gaze are still active; it is through her eyes and through her words that audience members see and

hear the story. In this way, the film supports and reaffirms an active female spectatorship even after Jo grows older and meets the man whom she will marry.

The active gaze of female spectators is firmly reinforced at the end of the film. After Beth passes away, Jo goes up to the garret to put some of her sister's things into their hope chest. There, Jo finds the forgotten treasures of her childhood. She looks at each one, touches them gently, looks off into the distance as if in thought, and then sits down to write. As Jo writes the story of her family, each of the sisters is heard in a voice over. As Jo writes, her mouth moves, but Beth's voice narrates, "The real charm of it lay in Beth's happy face as she leaned over the beautiful new piano and gently touched the beautiful black and white keys." Then Amy's voice continues, "During the next few minutes, the rumor circulated that Amy March had got 24 delicious limes." Meg's voice then says, "I told you that they dressed me up, but I didn't tell you that they powdered and squeezed and made me look a fashion plate." Jo's voice is heard next saying, "As she spoke, Jo took off her bonnet. A general outcry arose for all of her abundant hair was cut short." Laurie's voice is then heard saying, "Nothing's going to change Jo." Then as Jo finishes the manuscript, the four March sisters can be heard singing a Christmas hymn.

These short narrations confirm the fact that the story is told from a woman's point of view. The film negotiates between the male and female gaze by allowing Laurie's short line to be included in the discussion. However, it is Jo who decides which incidents in her life the audience will be able to watch. Even at the end of the film, she is in active control of the narrative. In addition, while it is Jo who mediates

the narrative for the audience by writing it down, the voiceovers suggest that the real story is not just from her perspective; it is told by Amy, Meg, and Beth as well and is as much their story as it is Jo's. The four sisters represent four different types of women. The film strives to represent multiple possibilities of nineteenth century womanhood through the four sisters; through these multiple possibilities, they are able to reach different types of female spectators. Through these multiple voices, female spectators are also allowed to have an active viewing experience in a way that they are not able to in traditional Hollywood films.

Conclusion: Topics for Future Study

Although my project has only examined a small sample of films, it implies broader concerns for studies. In particular, films made by women and films made after the second wave of feminism need to be examined for continuing patterns of patriarchal encryption. To begin with, the 1934 version of *The Scarlet Letter* fits the pattern of subconscious patriarchal encryption which Mulvey described in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." This is not to say, however, that because the films fit into the patriarchal schema, all women are unable to find pleasure or enjoyment while viewing them. It does, however, indicate that some female viewers might not be able to identify with the film's central characters and may therefore feel left out of the voyeuristic viewing experience.

Both the 1936 version of *The Last of the Mohicans* and the 1933 adaptation of *Little Women* begin to break away from this pattern of encryption, which suggests that these films were less encoded in patriarchal language. This suggests that, theoretically, women would be able to identify with the active characters of this film and would therefore be able to find more pleasure when viewing it than when viewing other films which are more heavily encrypted in patriarchal language. In the case of *Little Women*, the break from patriarchal language may have occurred because Alcott's original novel is amenable to feminist revisions, or because the screenplay was written by a male-female team.

Each of the three later adaptations which were produced in the 1990s attempted to break away from the patriarchal tradition of exhibiting women on screen

as passive objects to be looked at and controlled by men. The 1995 version of *The Scarlet Letter* was the least successful in doing so. The film acknowledges changes in female agency and attempts to incorporate politically correct language, but at the same time, allows its female stars to be objectified and fetishized for male spectators. The 1992 adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans* also breaks away from traditional filmmaking by allowing its female protagonist to become more active as the film progresses. In addition, both the male and female stars of the film are created into spectacles to be looked at and enjoyed by viewers. Out of the six films I studied, I found that the 1994 adaptation of *Little Women* held the strongest female gaze. Its female characters were well rounded and it incorporated strong female voices which different types of women could identify with. Again, this gaze may have developed because a group of women created the film. However, by looking at this film in context with the other two adaptations of the 1990s, it is clear that filmmakers have begun to become more aware of female spectators' need for a more active gaze.

There is a need for future scholars to study film texts made after the second wave of feminism to examine how prevalent the active female gaze has become in contemporary cinema. In the future, scholars could study Hollywood films written, directed, or produced by women to decipher whether or not the traditional male gaze carries over into texts created by women. It would also be helpful to look at additional cinematic texts adapted from novels written by women to examine whether or not these texts are predisposed to carrying a stronger female gaze. In this way, scholars could examine whether or not contemporary films made after the second

wave of feminism but created by men are able to fully support the female gaze, or if women need to create their own sphere of activity where their voices can be heard and their gazes can be active.

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