

The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
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Oral presentation

'Mere Shadows of Human Forms': Intersections of Body Theory and Literary Adaptation in *Jane Eyre*

I have recently developed an interest in cinematic body theory and the ways women are presented in mass media. Although current scholars recognize the limitations of psychoanalytic ideologies of spectatorship, their works are still too dependent on theories of the gaze. Scholars should be in search of new ways to theorize the female body in film. I believe that critiquing the gaze is only part of the necessary work: we cannot challenge preexisting models if we do not propose new ones. From my work in literature, I have come to believe that body theory intersects with adaptation studies — a conflation that has not been widely explored in current scholarship. In this intersection between the two fields of criticism, I find a new model for theorizing the body that does not rely on the psychoanalytic gaze. Screen bodies represent cultural conflicts of what it means to be a woman, both in the society that produces the adaptation and in the society that produced the adapted text.

Because bodies in literature are conceptual, they are immune to the gaze — their translation to screen is necessarily bound to the realm of concept. My work differentiates concept-bodies, the kind found in literature, from corporeal-bodies, the fleshly inhabitants of the real world. The cinematic image-body is the resulting product when a literary concept-body and a corporeal-body are juxtaposed. Filmic image-bodies transcend the gaze because they are not corporeal, but they are also not static images; they are transient symbols that elude the viewer's control. I believe that cinematic body theory needs to shift from spectatorship of the corporeal-body to the concepts represented in an image-body.

I will use Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* for this project because scholars have made much of the novel's concern with femininity, self-image, and bodily control. However, none of these works addresses the ways literary female bodies have been translated to the screen. The image-body represents an idea of Jane, a literary character, but not an actual human being. I will show short clips from three or four adaptations to illustrate the interpretive, conceptual nature of the image-body. I find that conflicts arise between written and visual media, as well as between written and visual bodies. Some adaptations are so steeped in self-awareness of their filmic medium that they undercut traditional adaptation theories that privilege the adapted text. That is, the films feature techniques such as montage editing, sound, and costuming to appeal to the senses in ways that are unique to film.

I feel this venue would suit me because I believe in an interdisciplinary approach to cinema studies. I do not think a field as widely accessible as visual media studies should be confined to an English, Art, Anthropology, or Communications department alone, but instead should encompass perspectives from each discipline. Ultimately, I am assured that my intended contribution to The Body Project would benefit not only my interdisciplinary interests, but would also benefit students in other programs around the university, and would foster future interdepartmental collaboration.