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Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction

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Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in

Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction

by

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DEDICATION

"In every conceivable manner, the family is a link to our past, bridge to our future."

—Alex Haley

This dissertation is dedicated to Mamala, Christian, Gram, and Mark. Thank you, my family, with whom I share this achievement.

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ABSTRACT

A trend in neo-Victorian adaptations -- both novels and films-- that reimage, and at times reinterpret, canonical Victorian texts is the inclusion of nonwhite, mainly Black, perspectives, which has gained considerable traction in recent years. A vital aspect of this trend is the purposeful attempt to re-establish iconic Victorian characters through Black characterizations. In doing so, filmmakers and authors are reinvigorating familiar texts to provide an inclusionary space for the Black experience previously ignored in the original texts. These adaptations, which revisit and often reinterpret Victorian fiction, have undergone notable transformations by incorporating Black characters to fill voids in traditional literature originally rendered only from a white vantage point. Contemporary adaptations visualize the Black bodies that are noticeably absent from nineteenth-century fiction to recover a neglected Black experience. Modern revisionists use their respective adaptive media to bridge the historical to the modern, allowing the Victorian to speak to our moment.

This project investigates the treatment of the Black body in neo-Victorian adaptations of long nineteenth-century fiction. Addressing a racial void in Victorian literature, modern writers and filmmakers utilize various strategies to create spaces for Black representation in various visual media. Neo-Victorian films and graphic novels are interventionist, updating "classic" Victorian texts to reflect a new cultural moment, correcting, and redirecting the Victorian cultural legacy. These adaptations have altered the source novel but have left its essence primarily intact to afford modern audiences an alternative method to consider social problems

from a new vantage point. These adaptations dismantle and reassemble the original texts to remediate, repair, and reconstruct intersecting social theories of the nineteenth and twentieth/twenty-first centuries by presenting a Black point of view. With my research, I hope to call attention to this phenomenon and demonstrate that including Black voices in neo-Victorian adaptations serves as a compelling learning tool for fostering a more diverse cultural and literary landscape that relates to all members of the modern audience.

INTRODUCTION:

MAKING BLACKNESS VISIBLE IN VICTORIAN FICTION

In 2020, British choreographer Jeanefer Jean-Charles began touring a large-scale outdoor interpretative dance performance inspired by nineteenth-century photographs of Black Victorian men, women, and children. Titled "Black Victorians," Jean-Charles's traveling dance troupe, composed entirely of Black dancers, is costumed in an eclectic mix of contemporary dancewear combined with more traditional Victorian attire: men wear top hats and tails; women wear ball skirts and corsets. The dance itself is also a mixture, comprising various Black dance forms used to express the Black presence that existed in Victorian England. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Source: Underwood, Carys. *Uncanny Images* – Photograph of *Black Victorians*. July 25, 2021. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/jul/25/black-victorians-review-milton-keynes-international-festival. See Appendix E for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

According to Jean-Charles, her interpretive dance "explores a complex but often forgotten Black presence in pre-Windrush Britain that calls attention to previously hidden figures and challenges historical and contemporary perceptions" of the Black experience in Victorian society (Walters). Jean-Charles's intriguing use of interpretative dance to recover the Black subjects of previously lost nineteenth-century photography epitomizes the adaptative processes now occurring in contemporary media. Modern neo-Victorian authors, filmmakers, and artists, like Jean-Charles, are committed to (re)interpreting, visualizing, and presenting the Black experience of traditional Victorian culture, particularly its literature, in which the Black presence was nonexistent. Jean-Charles's *tableau vivant* creates a visual image that exemplifies the recovery of the lost and a layering of the contemporary with the Victorian, creating a cultural and temporal hybridity that speaks to modern audiences.

A trend in neo-Victorian adaptations that reimage, and at times reinterpret, canonical Victorian texts is the inclusion of nonwhite perspectives. To recover a neglected Black experience, contemporary adaptations, like Jean-Charles's dance, visualize the Black bodies that are noticeably absent from nineteenth-century fiction. Modern revisionists use their respective adaptive media to join the historical to the modern, thus enabling the Victorian culture to speak to our moment. This cultural hybridity makes "visible the historical presence of a Black diaspora" (Rachel Carroll 16).

When referring to the absence of race and Blackness in Victorian literature, Celia R. Daileader argues that "talking about race in the nineteenth-century Anglo-American canon often feels like navigating around a Black hole," since, as she further asserts, "Black characters are either simply not there at all, or so brutally abjected, demonized or stereotyped as to seem

unworthy of intelligent critical comment" (75).[1] This trend, according to Juan-José Martín-González, is "part of the revisionist drive which informs" these modern adaptations of traditional works (196). Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn define neo-Victorianism as "texts (literary, filmic, and audio/visual) [that] must in some respects be self-consciously engaged with the act of (*re*)*interpretation*, (*re*)*discovery* and (*re*)*vision* concerning the Victorians" (4). The authors' emphasis here suggests that a crucial aspect of this definition is the idea that neo-Victorianism, in many instances, is a contemporary "re" interpretation of nineteenth-century British origin texts. As such, this reimagined media output reflects a more inclusive cultural modernity that embraces alternative racial, gendered, or other perspectives customarily suppressed in the traditional Victorian literary canon dominated by white authors.

Although there was a visible Black presence in Victorian Britain, scholars have focused on white Victorian society and culture, saying little about the Black experience in nineteenth-century Britain. After slavery formally ended in Britain and its colonized territories in 1833, London became a centralized hub that served as a locus for Black people coming from newly freed slave states and territories. As Vanessa Dickerson points out, "a steady influx of Black immigrants arrived in Victorian Britain in the mid-1830s and continued migrating until around 1866" (55). Judith Bryan notes, there was a visible presence of Black citizenry in and around London throughout the nineteenth century (68). Rachel Carroll elaborates on the tangible consequences of Britain's participation in the transatlantic slave trade when she confirms that in

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[1] In this project, I use the term "Black" to designate people of African origin and descent (Killingray 52). The word "Black" designates a cultural identity, particularly for those people of and descended from the global African diaspora that took place throughout the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries (Hine 52). "Black" is capitalized to follow the current stylistic writing conventions of capitalizing the word when referring to those people of African origin and descent, following the May 2020 murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota by a white police officer, Derick Chauvin, and the ensuing Black Lives Matter movement consequent to Floyd's death (Clark 6). I will use the designation "African American" when discussing Black people descended from Africans enslaved in the United States (Locke and Bailey 106).

both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "thousands of people of African origin were living

in London and other major port cities, including sailors who had served on British ships, former

or escaped slaves from the British colonies, and those in flight from America," resulting in

thousands of citizens of African ancestry living in London and other regional areas during this

period (19).

Despite the fact that Black Victorians existed, moving, working, and living within

nineteenth-century British environs, this Black presence is often not reflected in established

Victorian literature. Where there are hints of Black appearance, it is frequently represented as

monstrous: Black characters, often indirectly or marginally rendered, are usually presented as

demonic distortions of Black identities. In classic Victorian texts, the Black body is frequently

portrayed as a hidden site of horror, implying the "grotesque," or, as we will see later in this

discussion, the abject other within the social construct actualized in the text.[2]

Considering the neglected representation of Blackness in contemporaneous Victorian

fiction, neo-Victorian literature and film could theoretically offer an added dimension to these

traditional texts, since neo-Victorian revisionist authors have an obvious advantage over

nineteenth-century writers. Modern adaptations facilitate greater literary freedom with fewer

cultural restrictions imposed by authoritative censorship. Ideally, literary autonomy permits neo-

Victorian authors to tackle issues of race and non-white perspectives freely. Modern writers,

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[2] Victorians viewed Blackness overall, and Black skin particularly, as a condition of inferiority. Nineteenth-century zoologist Robert Knox states, "There must be a physical and consequently a psychological inferiority in the dark races generally" (224). Essayist Thomas Carlyle more famously (or infamously) declared in his work, *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* (1849), and later in the more offensively revised *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1853), that Blacks "have to be servants to those that are born wiser than [Blacks], that are born lords of [Blacks]" (585). Modern theorists, including Frantz Fanon, consider Blackness as the state of self-consciousness for Black people. He describes the Black body as the quintessential concept of Blackness within a physical space, representing how white society conceptualizes Black in terms of whiteness instead of in terms of Blackness (10). George Yancy explains that the Black body is often explored "within the context of whiteness, a context replete with contradictions and mythopoetic constructions" (xv).

therefore, have more opportunities to address social topics seen as taboo in the nineteenth century, and neo-Victorian authors can finally give voice to Black characters that Victorian writers could or would not.[3] Current trends, particularly in television serial adaptations, like PBS's *Les Misérables* (2019) and Netflix's *Bridgerton* (2020), are popular period productions that prominently feature Black characters and incorporate a color-blind cast within the shows' storylines.[4] Similarly, films like the BBC's *Oliver Twist* (2007) and FX's *Great Expectations* (2023), which I closely examine in the third chapter of this project, present Black actors in more prominent roles that subvert the original characterizations within the canonical texts. However, as I discuss in Chapter 3, there is disagreement among scholars regarding the effectiveness of Black representation within neo-Victorian adaptations. Ayanna Thompson views color-blind casting ironically in that the race of an actor "can be discriminatory in some contexts but affirming in others," which might explain why there is still some apparent reluctance in neo-Victorian novels, and particularly in film, to portray prominent representations of Blackness (16).

Throughout this project, I interrogate how selected contemporary adaptations dissect and reconstruct their source texts to make room for representations of the Black body and the exploration of the Black experience, within and beyond the nineteenth century. I argue that, at times, the racialization of these characters does not hold up to scrutiny, as some adaptations avoid constructing any substantial plot around these Black characters (16). Therefore, since the

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[3] In this context, "giving voice" entails body, voice, and image as identity formation shapes the portrayal of the Black body in film and television productions. In examining the Black woman in popular media, Sherita Johnson analyzes the Black body and claims that an analysis of the "body includes the visual and physical representations, while an evaluation of voice includes the verbal and vocal expressions" (19).

[4] In examining the representation of Blackness and gender in *Bridgerton*, Stephanie Hanus maintains that, "Specifically, Black women are depicted in various positions of power that minimize racism and yet are simultaneously depicted in positions of oppression that serve to naturalize oppression of Black women, offering support for Bonilla-Silva's color-blind racism in media" (1).

Black characterizations are never explained in these adaptations, I further assert that the Black body is often only as a prop or token in these films, reducing the Black experience to a two-dimensional space within the adaptation. In Chapter 3, I examine the adaptations of *Oliver Twist* (2007) and *Great Expectations* (2023) in the context of color-blind casting and argue that the process of color-conscious casting, which is one that purposely considers an actor's race and ethnicity as a part of the text's social commentary, is the most inclusive process to feature Black characters in traditionally white roles.

Faithfulness to the canonical material is another excuse that authors and directors make for excluding Black characters from neo-Victorian adaptations. Therefore, contemporary films like Andrea Arnold's 2011 adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, which I analyze in the second chapter, received mixed to negative reviews from critics, particularly concerning Arnold's decision to cast a Black British actor as Heathcliff. However, the mystery of Heathcliff's racial origin and ethnicity has led to speculations as diverse as him being anything from Roma to Irish over the 200-year life of Emily Brontë's novel. Since Brontë conspicuously left Heathcliff's origin story incomplete, most likely as a well-developed plot maneuver, it is surprising that selecting what many industry magazines and blogs heralded as the "first Black" Heathcliff would be so controversial in the twenty-first century.[5] The key to understanding the adaptive mechanism between the source text and the contemporary adaptation is to consider what legacy the contemporary version has added to the nineteenth-century source material as an adjoining cultural artifact.

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[5] Silvia Aloisi writing for *Reuters News Service* says: "*Wuthering Heights* male protagonist Heathcliff is portrayed by a Black actor for the first time in Andrea Arnold's remake of one of English literature's best-known classics, screening in competition at the Venice film festival" (2011), and David Belcher for *The New York Times* writes about Arnold's film, "Heathcliff in this case is played by the Black actor James Howson, perhaps a reflection of scholarly arguments that Brontë was writing about race and class in addition to sexual inequality and the dangers of revenge" (2012).

As part of a literary legacy, these contemporary revisions replace outdated theoretical frameworks and replace them with new, updated, and revised configurations that speak more to contemporary audiences. However, revisionists retain the source texts as an identifiable framework that the audience recognizes. Irina Melnikova argues that audiences have a "nostalgic desire for the cultural past" that inspires the need for familiarity while at the same time longing for innovation (378). Melnikova elaborates on the contradiction that nostalgia and the process of adaptation generate in the audience:

> Both [nostalgia and adaptation] are grounded in and generated by absence—the absence of past time/space/text. Both are associated with a kind of desire to fill the temporal and/or spatial gap, to transfer the past into the present or to be transferred to the past, to recreate a sense of continuity. Both are fundamentally elusive and ambivalent in marking an absent presence […]. (378)

Nostalgia and adaptation embrace duality: "both of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (Boym xii-xiv). The same dual layering between Victoriana and the modern allows Victorian culture to speak to the contemporary moment, creating temporal hybridity within the adaptive material. The traditional texts leap from words to visuals that embody Black characters and the Black cultural experience. In this mode, the Black body rests in a prominent position within the adaptation that re-envisions Black embodiment for a modern audience with an "affection for nostalgia" but who craves more racially diverse representations in modern adaptations of nineteenth-century texts (Hutcheon 12).

This project is in response to the current trends in revisionist adaptations of nineteenth-century Victorian fiction, which finally make visual the Black presence in period media. Rachel Carroll maintains that neo-Victorianism has "the potential of interrogating or indeed rewriting

the past by giving voice to previously marginalized viewpoints" (27). My project investigates whether these reimagined afterlives live up to the potential to, as Rachel Carroll puts it, "carefully intersect the dynamic intricacies of Black presence and absence in neo-Victorian fictions," or if neo-Victorian media is missing the opportunity to finally give a voice to Blackness in Victoriana (27). Paul Gilroy clarifies this adaptive potential by claiming: "film and television adaptations of narratives set in the nineteenth-century period play a powerful role in shaping popular perceptions about British identity and heritage and can play a crucial role in either contesting or reinforcing the construction of a Black presence as an 'illegitimate intrusion'" in neo-Victorian fictional works (7). Catherine Hall also addresses Black identity as she clarifies what role memory and reparation of the past, or what she calls "reparatory history," plays in reconstructing a revisionist history that includes Black images to "reshape historical memory" as a means of racial reconciliation of the "gross inequalities" associated with institutional racism (9). These interconnected issues concerning memory and reparation as they relate to adapting and reimagining an alternate historical past are additional avenues that I explore in this dissertation.

This project examines how modern adaptations of canonical Victorian literature situate the Black body within traditional plotlines and characterizations to re-engage and recover a lost heritage ignored in and by the source texts. When considering the Black body, the neo-Victorian adaptations examined here visualize the Black experience through the *re*vision of Black embodiment within a space absent in the original novel. In this context, the term "Black body" symbolizes the embodiment of the Black presence and the racial perspective through Black characterization within the neo-Victorian adaptive media. The definition of the Black body and the method in which it represents the embodiment of Blackness in neo-Victorian adaptations is

central to this project. My reading of the Black experience through the symbol of the Black body coincides with modern Black studies theorists, like Harvey Young, George Yancy, and Brandon Davis, who all conceptualize the Black body as a signification of the Black experience within the modern sociopolitical structure. Davis particularly demarcates the role of the Black body as a literary metaphor for the lived experience of Black people. While speaking on racial abjection, which I address later in this introduction and more specifically in Chapter 4, Davis provides a succinct, comprehensive delineation of the Black body and its symbolic function:

> The Black body is a political, social, and cultural product. The Black body is never individual, but rather, representative of the Black collective. The devaluing of Black bodies goes together with the exclusion of Blacks from full citizenship. In America, slavery designated the Black body as ugly, subhuman, and sexually available, requiring regulation and correction. The Black body is the perfect picture of abjection: dark, dirty, and not White. The Black body represents a triple loss—absolute domination, biological alienation, and social death. Black slave bodies were living laboratories of total objectification. (150)

The aspects of Davis's characterization of the Black body and the cultural space it does or does not occupy are central to my arguments throughout this project. In each of the chapters, the Black body's political, social, and cultural components are analyzed in some form to understand how the Black presence is portrayed in these contemporary reworkings of nineteenth-century fiction. My examination reveals that although a Black perspective works purposely through these adaptations, this perspective is sometimes devalued. The Black presence is ignored, excluded, or reduced to the monstrous abject. The Black characterization implies that filmmakers and writers

feature Black characters to satisfy the audience's gaze rather than to present the Black experience in nineteenth-century society in any meaningful way.

The theoretical framework for my dissertation that investigates Black representation in modern adaptations of nineteenth-century literature is constructed from three primary fields: Black studies, neo-Victorian studies, and adaptation studies. This methodology informs the project's overall argument in terms of the research questions that initially shaped this examination: How do modern novels and films represent Blackness within a Victorian fictional landscape that is a reinterpretation of a historical past that may or may not have existed in the first place? To what extent do modern authors and directors include Blackness as a vital component of their reinterpretations of traditional Victorian literature? What space, if any, has now been carved out for Black Victoriana and its representations in the contemporary neo-Victorian collective oeuvre? Finally, while neo-Victorian revisionists are reinterpreting and reimagining Victorian afterlives, are they attempting to repair and restore the Black presence in Victoriana that has previously been ignored? Such questions can be approached by exploring the intersection of Black studies, adaptation theory, and neo-Victorian criticism, all of which invite a conversation about how, for what purposes, and with what effects, neo-Victorian texts, films, and movies represent Blackness.

Black Studies

In his seminal work on the Black body and its connection to the white gaze, Harvey Young argues that the Black body, as the "other," is associated with the "racialized look" that announces Blackness and "transforms, dislocates, imprisons, and objectifies the Black body" (9). The white gaze informs objectification, which also restricts the perception of the Black body as the exclusive expression of Blackness that "becomes a singular conceptual body within white

imagination" (Young 7). Young's argument is of particular relevance to Chapter 2 of this dissertation, where I examine the portrayal of Heathcliff as a Black man in Andrea Arnold's 2011 film adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. I argue that due to his race in an all-white environment, Heathcliff is reduced to nothing more than a physical embodiment of otherness; as a result, the white gaze views him entirely as a representation of the audience's perception of his character. bell hooks goes even further, characterizing the white gaze as another aspect of white supremacy, its "fascination with the way white minds perceive Blackness" and Black imagery serving as apparatuses for white consumption (178). George Yancy's groundbreaking critical theories also identify the Black body as a subject of the white gaze. Using Frantz Fanon's conceptualization of Black signification as a backdrop, Yancy argues that the Black body is "weighed down" by the white gaze and expectations that the Black body is intended to fulfill, specifically for the sake of whiteness, rather than Blackness (85). Yancy further postulates that the Black body is controlled by the power of the white gaze, which sees it as the "quintessence of evil," again identifying the Black body in terms of whiteness rather than in terms of Blackness (xx). Although Yancy sees the Black body as degraded, suppressed under the weight of the white gaze, he believes:

> The Black body is a historical project and as such is capable of taking up new historical meanings through struggle and affirmation. More generally, then, the body's meaning is a site of contestation. That the body is a site of contested meanings signifies the historicity of its "being" as lived and meant within the interstices of social semiotics, institutional forces, and various discursive frames of reference. Hence, the body is less of a thing or a being than a shifting or changing historical meaning that is subject to cultural configuration and reconfiguration. (xii)

The critical point in Yancy's argument is that while the Black body struggles for affirmation in a white-dominated society, it is through this resistance that the Black body attains the power necessary to obtain new historical significance. Therefore, the question then becomes how the Black body sustains itself in neo-Victorian adaptations under the constant scrutiny of the white gaze. Specifically, how does the Black body embody the Black perspective, and how is it allowed to perform Blackness in these modern reworkings that cater to a white audience?

Neo-Victorian Criticism

I use neo-Victorian criticism to substantiate my hypothesis regarding modern-day cinematic and textual reinterpretations, revising, and re-imaging nineteenth-century British fiction. Neo-Victorianism is a new critical field recognized across several disciplines, and it provides essential context to the critical framework on Black representation in contemporary film and fiction adaptations of Victorian literature. Neo-Victorian criticism will also validate my theoretical investigation of neo-Victorian media influenced by the original Victorian source texts on which the contemporary adaptations are based. Postulating on the issue of dating neo-Victorian media, Marie Kohlke and Christian Gutleben admit:

> Neo-Victorianism's exact 'date of birth' remains a contentious issue, with critics
> variously situating its origins immediately after the death of Queen Victoria, after the
> Second World War and the end of high Modernism, or even later still, most commonly in
> the 1960s with the publication of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John
> Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). (18)

The emerging trends in neo-Victorianism include reimagining feminist, gender, and sexual socio-political topics within the Victorian period. Issues of Empire and Imperialism are also at the forefront of neo-Victorian studies. Of particular interest to my project is the obvious gap in

the field concerning Black studies and depictions in neo-Victorian media. The scholars and critics who address the emerging trends in the field include Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, who offer a conclusive and influential definition of what neo-Victorianism is and what boundaries should delineate the fiction within the genre. Heilmann and Llewellyn also consider the apparent trend in contemporary media to unambiguously incorporate forms of what modern culture interprets as Victorian influences, whether they are direct inspirations derived from actual Victorianism or not. Most prevalent is the Victorian impact on cinema and current novelization, where nineteenth-century British afterlives, categorized as "neo-Victorian" or a heavy-handed application of a purely Victorian aesthetic recreated in films that reimagine a Victorian past. The frequent appearance of the neo-Victorian aesthetic in contemporary cinema and novels proves the modern media's insistence on revising Victorian aesthetics or specific elements associated with nineteenth-century British culture.

Adaptation Theory

In Chapters 2 and 3, I turn to adaptation theory to engage with the concept of text-to-film fidelity and with critical debates concerning to what degree adaptations should, or even can, stay faithful to their source texts, particularly considering the neo-Victorian trend of color-blind casting and casting Black actors to play presumably white roles from nineteenth-century literature. Linda Hutcheon considers the value of both novels and films when assessing adaptation, contending that both media must be evaluated together. I also ground my critical review of adaptation theory with Thomas Leitch, as he interrogates film adaptation studies from a historical vantage point and provides additional guidelines for cinematic adaptation.

An aspect of adaptation that features prominently in Chapters 1 and 4 is the function of Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject within the adaptative process. Adaptations are

simultaneously the same and different, nostalgic and contemporary, completed and in progress. These dichotomies signify abjection: adaptations disrupt order because they are not old or new but rather, they reside in a liminal space between two positions. Defining how the abject interrupts systems, Kristeva says: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, and rules? The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (*Powers* 4). In other words, in the past, the medium was a traditional novel, but now, it has been adapted into a film, or a contemporary graphic novel, or a television series. In this new, entirely different medium, the characters are removed from one contextual framework and placed in another. Adaptations are not subject or object; they fall somewhere in between, and the customary boundaries that separate the subject and object are blurred. The disruption of these boundaries can make adaptations unstable, and as such, the adaptation may be considered degraded or "less than" the original. The abject reaction to adaptations may illicit a negative response ("I don't like the adaptation as well as the original") because adaptation contradicts memory by altering and shifting understanding. Therefore, adaptations are located in a fidelity paradox: on the one hand, they are assumed to remain faithful to the source text; however, they are also expected to be original. Chanda Williams addresses this fidelity paradox, which she terms a "false binary of fidelity," asserting:

> The adaptation is expected to stay faithful to the novel or original work while addressing a larger social commentary. If the adaptation strays too far from the source text, then the adaptation is an abomination" or "unfaithful" and "bad." These loaded words carry the weight of discrimination upon them: to fall outside the accepted range of adaptation is to seal its fate as a poor adaptation. Often, individuals will seek out the source text as a

means of determining whether or not an adaptation was effective, leading to the fidelity

debate […]. (284)

While adaptation can be a disruptive force between the past and present, it is the concept of

legacy and heritage that can remediate the adaptation from the abject. This renewal can restore

order to the system and bridge the gap between old and new, between familiar and unknown.

Rather than presenting a process of destabilization, legacy provides a process of continuity. In

the case of a past memory fraught with trauma and mental wounding, adaptations can interrupt

that painful echo from the past, purify it through revision in the present, and preserve it as

heritage for the future, thereby renewing the source material into artistic expression.

Monstrosity and the Abject

In defining the function of the Black body concerning the white gaze, Yancy says, "It

[the Black body] is monstrous; it is that which is to be feared and yet desired, sought out in

forbidden white sexual adventures and fantasies" (xvi). Another concept that informs my

argument is the idea of racialized monstrosity. It is common to read monstrosity as a place where

desire coexists with anxiety, transgression coexists with subjection, and selfhood coexists with

otherness. In this precept, the Black body is frequently perceived as the "other" inside past and

present social orders that are centered around white patriarchy. According to Barbara Creed,

"definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient

religious and historical notions of abjection, particularly in relation to the following religious

"abominations": sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human

sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest" (46). Any

implications of raciality in Victorian texts often are expressed in monstrous terms, particularly in

the Gothic genre popular in the nineteenth century that frequently depicts monstrous personae,

such as Frankenstein's Creature, Heathcliff, and Dracula, all of whom I examine in this project. These characters, personified as uncontrollable *dark* monstrosities within their respective texts, are abandoned, abused, and rejected by a violent culture that contributes to the creation of monstrosity through systematic discrimination. As a result, they commit monstrous acts to fit in with a society that harshly rejects them because of their fluid identities. Nevertheless, their monstrous embodiment offers a fascinating location that defies logic—a boundary that separates the hideous from the desirable. Kristen Wright builds on this contradiction, acknowledging that "we withdraw from that which disgusts us, and we move toward that which is desirable," (vii) and for this reason, "Man has always had, and probably will always have, a love/hate relationship with the monstrous because the monsters that we create reflect our deepest forbidden desires" (ix).

Often, Black bodies transcend in an indefinite space, a virtual void, between disgust and desire, an instability of Blackness within the social construct that others Black bodies. When Black bodies are forced to operate outside the white order as excluded others, they are identified as abject, and according to Brandon Davis, Black abjection is rooted in enslavement as "slavery established the permanent, violent domination of inherently alienated and dishonored persons" and the "Black body has been simultaneously repulsive and desirable in ways that White bodies have not" (147). Davis goes on to argue that African Americans have not been able to "renegotiate their identity" from the abject. Dawn Keetley situates racialized abject alongside slavery and monstrosity, claiming that "Monsters most often emerge from those impulses and people who are 'Othered' by society […] Above all, perhaps, Black people have long served as America's monsters […] The transformation of Black Americans into monsters preceded film; indeed, the very system of slavery depended on it, as did post Emancipation Jim Crow and

persistent systemic racism" (186-187). Considering Keetley's argument, in the fourth chapter, I

analyze the 1972 blaxploitation film adaptation *Blacula* and its graphic novel adaptation *Blacula:*

Return of the King from 2023, in the context of slavery, both literal and metaphorical, and the

Black vampire monster fighting against a contaminated bloodline inherited from symbolized

institutions of racism. Davis's and Keetley's points on the abject are also intriguing when later in

the same chapter I investigate how *Blacula: Return of the King* strives to renegotiate a Black

identity to correct problematic racial aspects of the *Blacula* film.

      The white social order, consistently valuing objects associated with whiteness, impedes

the stability of Black bodies that attempt to function in a social order that others Blackness and

transforms those bodies into monstrosities, or using Kelly Hurley's term, shifts those Black

bodies into "abhuman(s)" (3). Citing Kristeva's abject theory, Hurley elaborates on the abhuman

subject:

> A not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger
>
> of becoming not-itself, becoming other. The prefix "ab" signals a movement away from
>
> a site or condition, and thus a loss. But a movement away from is also a movement
>
> towards – towards a site or condition as yet unspecified – and thus entails both a threat
>
> and a promise […] The word "human" may be seen as resonating with […] Kristeva's
>
> formulation of the abject. (4)

In terms of the Black body, articulating monstrosity in cultural media traditionally aligns with

manifestations of otherness and abjection. Although the movement away that Hurley postulates

here signifies a loss, an absence, or a lack, the movement toward indicates a reconciliation that

connotes reparation. The adaptations analyzed in the following chapters move along with their

respective source texts toward the recovery of a Black legacy that is absent in the original texts

due to the othering and abjection of Black bodies that have been systematically excluded and oppressed.

Due to the systematic exclusion and dehumanization of Black bodies, the adaptations examined in the subsequent chapters progress alongside their individual source texts in the direction of reclaiming a Black heritage that is lacking in the original texts. This is accomplished by placing these neo-Victorian writings in the context of earlier adaptations and their original texts through the use of "culture-texts," or texts that survive historical periods because of frequent and steady modifications that contribute to their cultural influence. A text gains cultural life through recurrent alterations that turn it into popular culture once it achieves the level of culture-text. It is through a literary legacy that conveys aspects of the culture-texts that I interpret as the embodiment or visualization of the Blackness absent from the source text and presented to a modern audience who seeks familiarity with the traditional text but creativity in reimagining it.

The culture-text ensures the source text's continuation, which carries on a tradition of further alterations. In this context, I study adaptable materials that attempt to update or replace the existing literary conventions to respond to current trends, while also taking a corrective look ahead from the original texts. The changes examined in this research particularly address the present movement in modern media to incorporate more voices from diverse racial backgrounds. These chapters reflect the different approaches to understanding textual heritage and the influence that one text can inherit from another. Visual depictions and illustrations from three films and two graphic novels anchor this project, which considers how the Black body, as a symbol for Black perspective, embodiment, and experience, is actualized within these current adaptations that are still influenced by foundational texts from the past. In order to convey an underlying message that speaks to modernity and racial inclusion, these writings make extensive

use of Black bodies. The visual imagery included in these adaptations frequently places Black

bodies front and center, making them (finally) seen to remind viewers that these bodies have

historically been purposefully hidden.

Overview of this Dissertation

The chapters in this dissertation call attention to an emerging trend in contemporary

media that seeks to reimage nineteenth-century literature with a Black presence and from a Black

perspective. Each of the texts investigated here, whether written or visual, speaks to Black

representation uniquely. In my first and fourth chapters, I examine traditional novels beside their

contemporary graphic novel adaptations. I analyze the traditional novels alongside their film

adaptations for the second and third chapters. In each of the four substantive chapters, I

interrogate the representations of the Black experience, the Black body, and its position within

the nineteenth-century source texts and corresponding contemporary neo-Victorian visual

adaptations. My dissertation aims to situate the modern adaptation and its source novel in

conversation with each other in order to address the treatment of the Black body within Victorian

fiction and their neo-Victorian reworkings. Adaption theorists like Thomas Leitch opine that "To

evaluate adaptations fairly, we need to evaluate their source texts as well—an activity traditional

adaptation study, which takes the literary text as an unquestioned touchstone of value for any

adaptation, has traditionally avoided" (*Film Adaptation* 16). Therefore, my study uses the

analysis of the source texts as a foundation to investigate how the neo-Victorian adaptation first

reimagines and interprets the source text and how the adaptation includes or excludes the Black

body.

In the first chapter, I examine racialization in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and

Victor LaValle's graphic novel *Destroyer* (2007). This latter six-part graphic series reinterprets

Shelley's Frankenstein myth within the context of the current Black Lives Matter movement.[6]

With *Destroyer*, Victor LaValle reinterprets Shelley's 1818 Creature as the Black body, first as

Victor Frankenstein's actual and original creation, and later as a young Black boy, a descendant

of Frankenstein, who is brought back to life (after being shot by police), much like the original

creation from Shelley's 1818 text. In *Destroyer*, LaValle incorporates the Frankenstein allegory

and the textual motifs of justice and vengeance prevalent in Shelley's plotline while also

signifying the Black body as a trope for social commentary about Blackness. These ideas are

combined with twentieth- and twenty-first-century cultural references to the Black Lives Matter

movement and its response to the deaths of unarmed Black men and boys by mostly white police

officers. Using the Black body, LaValle subverts the current culture-text and degrading

representations of the Creature, a creature broadly interpreted by film interpretations of Shelley's

character and redefined by popular culture. Rather than recognizing the current Frankensteinian

culture-text, which builds upon a particular creature iconography shaped by the theatrical and

cinematic adaptations of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, LaValle returns to Shelley's

1818 novel to resurrect a version of the Creature as innocent, peaceful, and seemingly more

human, offering the audience a character more in line with Shelley's 1818 textual creature, who

has been drastically changed in the majority of adaptations and never fully realized in modern

popular culture. By placing Shelley's 1818 creation within a Black body in *Destroyer*, LaValle

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[6] Originally published in 1818, *Frankenstein* is clearly a Romantic era novel; however, critics have consistently analyzed the text from a Victorian perspective, based primarily on its political, cultural, and social themes that transcend both Romantic and Victorian periods. Also, Shelley's novel had a resurgent popularity in Victorian culture. Novel and film adaptations have traditionally located Shelley's story in the middle of the Victorian period and various critics, including Thomas Leitch, have often analyzed it as a such (97). The most popular edition of the novel is the 1831 publication, which appears only six years before Queen Victoria's reign begins. Notably, the 1831 edition, itself an adaptation of the 1818 text, is the version more widely read. I will address the influence of *Frankenstein* as culture-text in the first chapter discussion.

contributes to the Frankensteinian culture-text and offers a political statement opposing the dehumanization of Black boys and men in the United States.

  With a focus on the 2011 film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, directed by Andrea Arnold, in my second chapter, I explore the politics of reading Heathcliff within the context of the Black body. There is a long tradition of *Wuthering Heights* adaptations that racialize Heathcliff in some manner. In other words, as Rachel Carroll puts it, Heathcliff is "explicitly […] racially marked" throughout the various textual and cinematic adaptions of Brontë's novel (20). In keeping with current scholarship, I analyze the Black body in the racialization of the Heathcliff character and examine the thematic and interpretive implications of (finally) casting Heathcliff as Black, as Arnold does in her film. However, I take the discussion further by examining both how the Heathcliff/Catherine dynamic shifts or changes in an interracial relationship between a *Black* Heathcliff and a *white* Catherine and how the director deals with this dichotomy. As with Shelley's novel, the Black body, here Heathcliff, has been adapted by neo-Victorian revisionists as a tool of retaliation against whiteness and violence. The overly romanticized 1939 film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* by William Wyler has influenced modern viewers, who prefer to romanticize the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine. Arnold defies the novel's narrative structure by showing the film from Heathcliff's point of view, often having him see the other characters from a distance and making the audience watch and empathize with him in his role as a perpetual outsider. Much like Brontë does in the novel, Arnold places Heathcliff on the periphery of Yorkshire society. However, by casting Black actors as Heathcliff—a man Arnold reimagines as an abandoned African slave—the filmmaker raises the stakes in her version. Using Kamilla Elliot's "incarnational theory" of adaptation as a primary theoretical source, in my second chapter, I analyze how the film's portrayal of Heathcliff

as an African slave marks an adaptive turn in reimagining Brontë's character to address the psychological and physical effects of racial violence on people of color in both the past and the present, and how Arnold's cinematic adaptation amplifies the themes of violence and abuse that underpin Brontë's novel.

In my third chapter, I explore the Black and racially integrated casting of Charles Dickens's characters, particularly Nancy, portrayed by Black British actress Sophie Okonedo in the BBC's *Oliver Twist* (2007), and Estella, played by Shalom Brune-Franklin, another Black British actress in FX's *Great Expectations* (2023). The color-blind casting featured in these two adaptations presents logistical issues that critics have noted. Lisa Anderson maintains that color-blind casting becomes counterproductive when selecting nonwhite or integrated casts to fill a perceived void of Blackness (15). I argue that at times, the racialization of these characters does not hold up to scrutiny, because the adaptations avoid constructing any substantial plot around these Black characters (16). Because the characters in the examples I have chosen are females navigating a race-based nineteenth-century class system, neither film approaches this issue, and both ignore the socio-political implications of the racially discriminatory environment these characters would be traversing.

Finally, my fourth chapter deals with the intertextuality between William Crane's 1972 blaxploitation film, *Blacula*, and Rodney Barnes's sequel *Blacula: Return of the King* (2023), a graphic novel adaptation of the *Blacula* film, itself a loose reinterpretation of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*. As a part of my examination of the Black body's representation in neo-Victorian media, I am particularly intrigued by the implications concerning vampirism and the Black body as a metaphor for the legacy of race-based slavery and institutional racism working through the *Blacula* film and then onto the themes presented in *Blacula: Return of the King*. This

fourth chapter takes the project full circle, returning to Victorian monstrosity as discussed in Chapter 1 where I examine Shelley's *Frankenstein* and LaValle's *Destroyer*. The Creature, who, like Dracula, is another Victorian monster frequently used in contemporary media as a figure of adaptation who speaks to cultural concerns of race, discrimination, and social injustice. LaValle's *Destroyer* aligns with and works alongside Barnes's *Blacula: Return of the King*, with similar adaptive patterns emerging from both texts. As immortal figures with perpetual afterlives within adaptative media, Dracula and the Creature are characters who gain strength from other works, including source and adaptive texts. These characters are reworked from their original texts to remediate problematic textual elements from the source work.

Although both characters function alongside each other, they diverge in particular areas, most notably concerning the durability of their monster figures. In La Valle's adaptation, the Creature character is eventually defeated to make way for another incarnation of the reanimated corpse embodied in a young Black boy. However, in Barnes's comic, Blacula lives on as he eventually defeats his nemesis, Dracula. *Destroyer* adds to *Frankenstein*'s cultural legacy, while *Blacula: Return of the King* attempts to restore the cultural legacy of *Blacula*, thereby creating a new aspect of the story and character that moves alongside the original film rather than eradicating it. In these instances, the adaptive process reveals that at the center of these graphic novels lies a rich literary legacy that articulates concepts concerning heritage and remediation of problematic textual themes. Blacula*: Return of the King* engages in an adaptive process that takes a dead text, reanimates it to respond to a cultural trend, and confronts a problematic aspect of the cultural legacy left (abandoned) by the source text, in this case, the film. For *Dracula*, *Blacula*, and *Blacula: Return of the King*, this means that the transformation from text to film and back to (visual) text or from one state to another, transferring expression from one adaptation

to another, allows both *Blacula* and *Blacula: Return* to assume, salvage, and in the graphic

novel's case remediate, the previous adaptative material, giving new meaning to the texts.

Recasting the Conversation

Blackness and Black representation in neo-Victorian media have not been closely

scrutinized by current scholarship. Contemporary trends have focused on feminist and queer

representations in modern Victoriana, making the topic of Black representation in neo-Victorian

adaptations an area that needs more discussion, as its examination, especially regarding modern

cinematic and visual adaptations of Victorian fiction, remains extremely limited. Research has

been surprisingly quiet on Black characters in visual adaptations that reimagine Victorian fiction

Rachel Carroll addresses this lack of scholarship, asserting that "to date, scholarship on the

theory and practice of integrated casting has tended to focus on theatre, with a special emphasis

on the history of the American stage (and productions of Shakespeare)" (15). The scope and

depth of analysis on race in cinema has remained notably inadequate. Rachel Carroll admits that

"the persistent absence of non-white faces in these productions has yet to receive sustained

critical attention within the field of adaptation studies," leaving a void in adaptation and literary

studies that begs for additional examination and analysis of neo-Victorian fiction as it relates to

these critical fields (15).

Although current scholarship on race and Black representation in neo-Victorian film is

narrow, it is an area of study that requires attention and deserves a place in the current literary

conversation surrounding neo-Victorian criticism alongside gender and queer studies. While I

examine the apparent absence of Black representation in neo-Victorian film and media, which is

the current topic of debate amongst scholars and theorists, I am more intrigued by how the few

instances of Black depictions in neo-Victorian media are represented in film and novels that

reinterpret the Victorian period. I focus my examination primarily on what is there rather than what is not. I explore modern authors and filmmakers' creative choices when appropriating, revising, and modernizing original Victorian texts in both novels and films, paying close attention to racial and ethnic ideologies in the Victorian era and those in modern times. Additionally, I investigate contemporary texts and films that reimagine and reinterpret the original texts and examine how neo-Victorian revisionists reconstruct and redeem the racialized body. I also investigate how the racialized body is positioned, or repositioned, within the alternate histories of neo-Victorianism. Finally, I further explore where neo-Victorian fiction situates the Black body and investigate whether the body is located in a more prominent and less marginalized space within the text or film adaptation.

While there are recent scholarly conversations on race and the nonwhite presence in Victorian literature and culture due to existing critical race theory controversies, scholarship is quiet on how neo-Victorianism in contemporary cinema and literature treats the Black perspective as it reimagines canonical Victorian novels. My project examines Blackness in classic Victorian fiction as a basis for exploring how the Black viewpoint is presented through the lens of modern neo-Victorianism. I further examine how canonical texts characterize the racialized body as the corrupted other self and how its consistently violent transformation interprets the embodiment of Blackness. I consider the traditional depictions of the Black body's transformation as representing a warning against acceptance of the other a— symbol and/or a site of abjection, monstrosity, and horror within the self.

With my dissertation, I hope to contribute to Black studies and its place within the emerging field of neo-Victorianism by expanding the understanding of Blackness and the role of Black figures in original nineteenth-century source novels and, by extension, their contemporary

neo-Victorian adaptations. I hope to uncover the Black voices buried within the Victorian canon to demonstrate the value of analyzing Victorian fiction from a Black viewpoint, revealing how the Black presence influenced both nineteenth-century literature and its continued impact on modern media and popular culture. The Victorian texts that I analyze alongside their neo-Victorian reworkings in film and literature suggest that modern revisionists, whose output has taken the form of various media, have tried to include these presentations of Blackness in their reinterpretations of Victorian literature. However, my contribution to this conversation demonstrates that twentieth and twenty-first-century authors and filmmakers often fall short in representing the Black body and end up ignoring or misrepresenting Blackness, like the canonical Victorian texts their work is based on. With this in mind, my project highlights a void in scholarship within both Black studies and neo-Victorianism. It prompts the reader to consider issues of Black representation, and the lack thereof, in current neo-Victorian literature, and the necessity of attending to them.

CHAPTER ONE:

RECONSTRUCTION AND THE RACIALIZED BODY IN MARY SHELLEY'S

FRANKENSTEIN* AND VICTOR LAVALLE'S *DESTROYER

In Victor LaValle's afterword to *Destroyer*, his 2020 comic book adaptation influenced by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), the author shares his creative insight into the graphic novel, revealing that "this comic was inspired by Mary Shelley's novel and by the regular waves of black people murdered, without consequence, by the police forces of the United States" (Chapter 6). Due to *Frankenstein*'s persistent influence on contemporary media and culture, LaValle locates his narrative of systemic racism in the U.S. on a foundation established by the themes and motifs in Shelley's novel. Although *Frankenstein* is historically situated in the Romantic era, the novel remains adaptable to changing cultural ideas with its strong textual themes centered on gender, class, and race. The constant reworkings of the story and its characters, especially the various incarnations of Shelley's Creature, speak to the text's malleability and ability to conform to a specific era's cultural concerns, keeping *Frankenstein* socially relevant within a particular moment and frequently reimagined by popular media. Diane Hoeveler maintains that "Shelley's novel has remained front and centre in public consciousness, if not solely as a novel, then as a series of popular dramatic adaptations that changed as each era's anxieties altered," and it is this adaptability that allows each era's audiences to "tap into its [*Frankenstein*'s] culture's curious mix of existential anxieties and scientific aspirations," as they are rendered for any given period (175). Elizabeth Young concurs,

acknowledging that "the Frankenstein story has a long history of being used as a political metaphor, and at the start of the twenty-first century, it continues to shape political debate" (3). More pointedly, *Frankenstein*'s specific themes of race, discrimination, and social injustice make it and its characters ideal subjects for neo-Victorian adaptations, like LaValle's *Destroyer*, particularly in a modern racial climate punctuated by the unfair policing and police brutality that primarily targets Blacks.

In this chapter, I examine the Black body and racialization in Shelley's *Frankenstein* alongside LaValle's comic. This six-part graphic series that reinterprets the Frankenstein myth within the framework of the Black Lives Matter movement.[7] LaValle's *Destroyer* utilizes the Frankenstein allegory and the textual motifs of justice and vengeance dominant in Shelley's plotline and integrates these concepts with twentieth/twenty-first-century cultural references to the Black Lives Matter movement and its response to unarmed black boys and men killed by predominately white police officers.[8] The Creature takes on various racialized incarnations throughout both texts; I argue that LaValle first *unmakes* Shelley's Creature by displacing the current *Frankenstein* culture-text and then *remakes* the Creature, literally and metaphorically,

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[7] Founded in 2013 as a hashtag by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a U.S. social movement established to combat racism and racial violence, particularly police brutality, against Blacks, or as Christopher Cameron and Philip Luke Sinitiere define the movement as, "a new moment of opposition and insurgency against white supremacy's intended goal of disciplining Blackness and Black people […] BLM demands recognition of the dignity of Black life while it mobilizes protest for policy change, including the reorganization of resources for a more just and equitable world" (2).

[8] There are several examples of characters in *Frankenstein* who receive or do not receive legal and social justice. The Creature is a model for the theme of justice/injustice at the center of the novel. Patrick Vincent says of the Creature, "He learns about injustice directly, through his own oppression and abandonment, but also through others' stories, including the trials of Safie's father, and of De Lacey and Agatha, a series of examples in which the rule of law results in gross acts of injustice" (657). Speaking on the justice and revenge aspect concerning Victor and the Creature, Celina Jeray maintains, "And as cruel as the Creature was, he was still righteous; thus, he expected righteousness from Victor, whose 'justice, […], clemency and affection [were] most due' to the Creature" (65). Another reasonably obvious example of Shelley's interest in the theme of justice within *Frankenstein* is the character Justine, whose means "justice" in Latin, a young servant girl unjustly executed for killing Victor Frankenstein's younger brother.

through the Black body. LaValle uses the Black body to redefine the Creature universalized by

popular culture, a Creature primarily invented by cinematic interpretations of Shelley's character

and subverts the current culture-text and its dehumanizing and monstrous representations of the

Creature. Instead of acknowledging the current culture-text that builds on a specific Creature

iconography influenced by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatrical and cinematic

adaptations, LaValle returns to Shelley's novel to resurrect, so to speak, a version of the Creature

that is innocent, peace-loving, and ostensibly more human, giving the audience a character closer

to Shelley's 1818 textual Creature, who has been significantly altered in most adaptations and

never fully realized in contemporary popular culture. [9] With *Destroyer*, LaValle adds to the

Frankenstein culture-text to reclaim Shelley's 1818 Creature by locating him within the Black

body as a political testament against the ongoing dehumanizing of Black boys and men in the

United States.

Frankenstein as "Culture-Text"

Shelley's 1818 novel represents the core canon or an urtext that serves as a template for

plays, films, comics, and other texts that are connected to or a continuation of the 1818 book.[10]

Therefore, when tracking the progression of *Frankenstein* as a culture-text, examining the 1818

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[9] The questionable identity of Frankenstein's Creature makes identification challenging to approach when discussing the different versions of the Creature across Shelley's text, LaValle's graphic adaptation, and the various adaptations referenced in this chapter. I have adopted a readable shorthand for these characters to minimize confusion. Therefore, the Creature featured in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818 is referred to as "Shelley's 1818 Creature." The version of the Creature as the monster commonly known in popular culture, based on Boris Karloff's portrayal and Jack Pierce's make-up in the 1931 Universal *Frankenstein* film, is referred to as the "culture-monster." LaValle's Creatures, the "Destroyer" monster, and the "Akai-Creature" will be designated as such, respectively when discussing LaValle's *Destroyer* (See Appendix A).

[10] Charles Robinson presents a thorough chronology of *Frankenstein's* publication history. He theorizes that a hypothetical "ur-text" or a "first and now missing manuscript version of the story" was changed by several authors and editors into "the various texts that are now denominated by the formal title of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*" (13). However, since this "missing manuscript version" of Shelley's text is theoretical, I use the term "ur-text" to refer to the first text that Shelley *published* in 1818 as the foundational novel for all the proceeding editions (See Appendix C).

text would be the logical starting point since it is the first published version, and for this reason, *Frankenstein* scholars, including Mellor, consider the 1818 edition the "closest to the author's original conceptions" of the story's plot and characterizations ("Choosing a Text" 160).[11]

Although the 1831 version remains the most popular and well-known, Shelley's revisions for this later edition were influenced primarily by the popularity of the nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations of the novel, most notably Richard Brinsley Peake's play *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*. Thus Shelley's 1831 revised adaptation was already emulating other *Frankenstein* adaptations, and as an adaptation of other adaptations, the 1831 version moved away from the 1818 text. I will further examine *Frankenstein*'s adaptation history later on in the chapter.

Leaving the 1818 novel to one side for the moment, the more relevant connections come from the later adaptations of *Frankenstein* that are eventually incorporated into Shelley's 1818 storyline and treated as canon in subsequent adaptations. Popular culture adopts these adapted elements, integrates them into the principal canon and eventually accepts them as canonical components. The alterations made to Shelley's novel depend on the historical period in which they are adapted; therefore, they situate the text in a specific historical space that reflects the societal views popular at the time. According to Mark Jancovich:

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[11] Hindle argues that the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* is definitive because it is a comprehensive version that includes all the edits made by Mary Shelley and the various editors contributing to the novel (3). Hindle's argument appears to be in the minority amongst many *Frankenstein* scholars; however, most consider the 1818 edition to represent Shelley's intended vision. Jerrold Hogle summarizes modern critical thought on this issue by maintaining, "That text [the 1818 edition] …is, for many, the most indicative of its author's vision and worldview at the time, compared to her 1831 third edition (used for most of the twentieth century as the standard text), which changed the novel at key points. These alterations made it less radical for some critics, even as the 1831 version also included an introduction, much quoted since, featuring Shelley's memories of her tale's genesis […]" (829). Mellor also advocates for the 1818 novel as the definitive text, declaring: "I strongly believe the text preference should be the 1818 edition, for the same reasons that students of Romanticism prefer the 1805 edition of Wordsworth's *Prelude* to the final 1850 edition. The first completed versions of both works have greater internal philosophical coherence, are closest to the authors' original conceptions, and are more convincingly related to their historical contexts" ("Choosing a Text" 160).

Few, if any, of the films that are associated with Mary Shelley's novel were an adaptation of this source text, and many are actually adaptations of other sources, such as plays, other films and comic books. They are also rarely even simply adaptations of these other sources but produced in relation to a range of different intertexts. Indeed, texts never have a one-to-one relationship with an original source text but are also constructed through the hybridization of many varied materials. Adaptations of the Frankenstein story are inevitably a response to a range of other trends within the period in which they were made, trends that not only motivate an interest in materials culled from Mary Shelley's novel but also shape what materials are deemed to be of interest and how they are interpreted and hybridized with other elements from elsewhere. (191)

What is significant about *Frankenstein* as an urtext is its central themes addressing gender, class, science, and race, making it a readily available source for adaptation that effectively illustrates each adaptation's historical moment. In this way, the adaptations based on Shelley's urtext become just as, or even more, important as the first published novel itself, providing each era's audiences with a prototype that can be used to provide social commentary on current cultural issues.

Adopting Paul Davis's term "culture-text," Lissette Szwydky explains how texts endure through a "proliferation of adaptations in a particular historical moment" and how the culture-texts "exist beyond the scope of their respective 'original'" (131). Szwydky establishes that "in some cases, the original source is itself contested, forgotten, or otherwise ignored. Although each [culture-texts] corresponds to titles of published literary texts, they owe their widespread recognition and cultural visibility to regular adaptations, appropriation, and illusion" (131). This urtext-to-adaptation connection is particularly true of *Frankenstein*, which owes its cultural

longevity to the numerous reworkings of the story that consistently appeal to popular culture. However, popular culture has mostly forgotten Shelley's plotline featuring the articulate and compassionate Creature she presents in her book. According to Szwydky, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations kept *Frankenstein* at the forefront of public consciousness, and these adaptations, principally Peake's *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, provided audiences with the familiar "visual iconography that we [now] associate with the Frankenstein story in film, and other popular media, including the elimination of the Creature's ability to speak," and most importantly, the common misconception that confuses the creator with his Creature (132). Paul O'Flinn proposes, "There is no such thing as *Frankenstein,* there are only *Frankensteins*, as the text is ceaselessly rewritten, reproduced, refilmed, and redesigned. (194). In other words, each adaptation eventually contributes to the "Frankenstein culture-text," ensuring that Shelley's novel retains a definitive space within the literary canon.

Early Stage and Film Adaptations of *Frankenstein*

Szwydky explains that "collectively, scholarship and internet sources show that adaptation is the primary mode of circulation for the Frankenstein culture-text," implying that the popularity of Shelley's novel lies not with the book itself but in the story's frequent reworkings in film, television, radio, graphic novels, and comic book media (132). (The presence of the Creature in these last two areas is of particular importance to this research project). Put another way, the power of the culture-text does not necessarily lie in the culture-text itself but in its ability to be adapted into other media. Considering the culture-text model, a review of

Frankenstein's adaptation history as it evolved in theater and early cinematic adaptations is

necessary to contextualize the novel's continual adaptability. [12]

LaValle's graphic novelization builds on an extensive tradition of *Frankenstein*

adaptations, as the novel was first produced for the stage within five years of its 1818

publication, and it remained a popular adaptive source in British theaters throughout the middle

to late nineteenth century. Peake's "*Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, a relatively

successful theatrical adaptation, was produced in 1823" (Hoeveler 178); its importance to the

Frankenstein adaptation phenomenon cannot be overlooked. As Rebecca Baumann and Jonathan

Kearns indicate, "without its [*Presumption*'s] popularity, there might never have been a second

and third edition of the novel, and the story might not have made it to film— the medium in

which it has thrived perhaps even more than on the printed page—at all" (86).

Although *Presumption*'s plot was heavily adapted and differed significantly from

Shelley's source text, the play caught nineteenth-century audiences' imaginations and had a

successful run of thirty-seven weeks. Shelley herself saw the play, and although she remarked on

the "poor production," she was impressed by the overall adaptation of her novel (Hoeveler 180).

According to Hoeveler, the play's successful production prompted Shelley to revise

Frankenstein in 1823,[13] condensing the novel from three volumes to two and then further

adapting the text to one volume in 1831, resulting in the most popular and widely-read version of

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[12] While many scholars agree that Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* has been adapted more than any other novel, Shelley's *Frankenstein* comes in as a close second in being adaptable across various popular media (Cutchins and Perry, 2018; Szwydky, 2018).

[13] Influenced by the novel's first stage adaptations, the 1831 *Frankenstein* is an adaptation of the 1823 adaptation, which in turn is an adaptation of the novel's first published edition in 1818. This demonstrates how the Frankensteinian culture-text evolved, building upon itself to expand an emerging mythos based on the intertextual relationship between the first publication and its proceeding adaptations.

the novel.[14] Speaking on the common practice of literary adaptation for the eighteenth-and

nineteenth-centuries, Szwydky claims, "Adaptation was a standard commercial practice in

London's theaters and printing houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries […] sometimes,

these adaptations and appropriations were a significant reason the novels found critical acclaim

or commercial success in the first place" (130). This is true for *Frankenstein*, which received a

popularity boost from the successful release of the play in 1823. Hoeveler explains that two later

theatrical adaptations in 1826, *Frankenstein*; or *The Man and the Monster* by Henry Milner and

The Monster and the Magician by Antony Beraud and Jean-Toussaint Merle, further promoted

the novel and allowed it to remain in social consciousness (176).[15] According to Szwydky,

Milner's play is the first to dramatize the Creature's animation on stage, establishing the

iconography of creation that has become standard in modern *Frankenstein* adaptations, and

sanctioning "every notable Frankenstein dramatization on stage or screen [to] feature a creation

scene" (133). Although these early plays deviated from Shelley's 1818 novel, they still

characterized the Creature as a marginalized and othered being that his creator could not control.

As Szwydky further contends, efforts to compete for ticket sales and to make the production

more "innovative" and "original" triggered various textual revisions, resulting in adaptive

elements that significantly altered both Shelley's 1818 plotline and the novel's Creature (138).

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[14] The thematic differences between the 1818 text and what Anne Mellor refers to as the "heavily revised" 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* "[concern] the role of fate, the degree of Frankenstein's responsibility for his actions, the representation of nature, the role of Clerval, and the representation of family" ("Racial Science" 160). When considering the portrayal of the Creature in the 1818 and 1831 editions, Mellor maintains that the primary change that "the Creature is potentially good but driven to evil by social and parental neglect […] is "rejected" in the 1831 revision ("Racial Science" 165). Many modern scholars (Chris Baldick, 1987; Mellor, 1988; Jacqueline Foertsch, 2001) agree that the 1818 *Frankenstein* is the definitive version because it is: 1. the first version published; 2. the version less influenced by critics, and 3. closer to "the author['s] original conception" (Mellor, "Racial Science" 160), I have elected to use the Creature depicted in the 1818 text as the definitive representation of Shelley's Creature.

[15] See Appendix B.

These alterations (characterizing the Creature as inarticulate and bestial) eventually transform the Creature into the standard incarnation that has commonly recognized in contemporary culture, giving the culture-monster immediate recognition and "cultural staying power" while completely disregarding Shelley's 1818 version of the Creature (Szwydky 129). An examination of *Frankenstein*'s adaptation trajectory from 1818 to 1823 to 1831 reveals the novel's eventual progression to a culture-text. Also, it confirms that the book was always a fluid text that continued to evolve in response to nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations.

Building on these sensational visualizations of the Creature originating in late nineteenth-century theater, in 1910 adaptations of *Frankenstein* moved from theatrical to cinematic reworkings with Thomas Edison's *Frankenstein*.[16] Dennis Cutchins and Dennis Perry suggest that *Frankenstein* has had "a greater presence in popular media than any other single narrative over nearly two centuries," and at the forefront of these visual renderings of Shelley's novel is, of course her Creature, who was relegated in nineteenth-century theatrical productions to a relatively supporting role, but who eventually eclipsed his creator in early twentieth-century films as the featured character to such an extent that the name "Frankenstein" in popular media is now entirely referential to the Creature rather than to the creator (1). The Creature's horrifying, monstrous persona was well-suited for the developing early cinema; the most famous scene in the short Edison film is the Creature's sensational animation, a precursor to more dramatic creation scenes in modern *Frankenstein* films. One notable cinematic element in Edison's film

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[16] Edison's silent film was the first known motion picture called *Frankenstein* and was thought to be lost; however, the film was discovered in a private film archive in the 1960s (Schor 66). Two other early *Frankenstein* film adaptations released between Edison's 1910 film and James Whale's 1931 version: the now-lost *Life Without Soul* (1915), directed by Joseph Smiley, and the Italian *The Monster of Frankenstein* (1920), directed by Eugenio Testa.

that carries into the subsequent movies is the Creature's silence, which adds another motif to the future "Frankencinema" that will follow later in the period (Schor 67).

Progressing through cinematic development, the most significant *Frankenstein* film is the 1931 version directed by James Whale. It presents the most iconic images and persona (green skin, flat head, bolts in neck, and ambling, inarticulate muteness) often associated with the Creature who, in the Whale film, is reduced to a speechless and unthinking monster that is the antithesis to the philosophical and thoughtful being presented in the novel. Speaking about the Creature's drastic transformation in Whale's adaptation, James Heffernan contends that "[in] the first talking film version, James Whale's *Frankenstein* of 1931, the monster is totally silenced and thus forced […] to make gesture and expression tell a fraction of his (the Creature's) story, which is mutilated as well as severely abridged" (135). Esther Schor makes a similar observation about Whale's muted Creature: "Since James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein,* the Creature's virtual muteness has been an adjunct of Boris Karloff's huge, lumbering, deep-browed, flat-topped, monster, with conduction bolts protruding from his neck […] the Creature becomes, forever and anon, a monster" (130). Most notably, what the 1931 film does, as it channels the nineteenth-century theatrical portrayals of the Creature as a mindless, inarticulate brute, is recast the character into a grotesque monster with none of the emotional dimensions that Shelley infused originally into the character. The Creature's transformation into "The Monster" (as he is named in the film's credits) is absolute within mainstream culture, and this "culture-monster" that now dominates the culture-text has moved modern audiences completely away from the humane Creature that Shelley created.

Whale's interpretation of Frankenstein's Creature, which continues to impact current film and television re-imaginings of *Frankenstei*n, displaces the articulate, sensitive, philosophically

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insightful Creature from Shelley's 1818 novel. Celina Jeray agrees and summarizes the 1818 Creature persona as follows:

> The Creature was also very thoughtful and judicious. He cared for the villagers, next to whom he lived, so much that, to save them the distress of a sudden intrusion, he waited and, meanwhile, mastered their language and customs […] At the same time, nonetheless, the Creature was rather self-aware of his mental capabilities and intelligence as well as of his benevolent attitude. Not only did he manage to recover from his initial helplessness and clumsiness, but soon he became so smart that he was also able to help other people. (65)

With these characterizations of Shelley's 1818 Creature in mind, the extent to which Whale's film significantly influences modern adaptations requires consideration. While many foundational *Frankenstein* films serve as cinematic predecessors that add to or embellish the Frankenstein myth, Schor argues that the destructive treatment of the Creature in Whale's *Frankenstein* has prompted critics to "explore the implication of racism and lynching in the 1931 adaptation" (64). Jancovich also notes that "many commenters from the 1940s to the present have complained that, during the period, the Frankenstein monster lost its complexity and ceased to be a sympathetic, lonely and alienated figure and became a robotic killing machine" (193). This characterization of Whale's Creature is reminiscent of the racial and criminal stereotypes often attributed to Black men in the U.S. Victor LaValle exploits this by destroying Whale's representation of the monster and reinventing Shelley's 1818 Creature through the Black body, using it as a conduit for racial and social injustice.

The Racialization of Frankenstein's Creature

There is established scholarship addressing Frankenstein's Creature and race, with modern critics arguing that the text implies that the Creature could be read as a racialized figure

since Shelley assembles the Creature from various racial stereotypes associated with people of color, most likely to critique the abhorrent slave trade during the nineteenth century.[17] H.L. Malchow asserts that *Frankenstein* "reflects nineteenth-century attitudes toward non-Caucasian peoples" and notes that the text was inspired by Shelley's reading of "contemporary accounts of Blacks in the West Indies and Africa" (1). Malchow interprets the Creature as being Black and supports his hypothesis that Shelley's description of the Creature has "stereotypical Black features" with the "Black lips" reference made in Victor's initial description of the Creature after it is first animated (1). Malchow further argues that, like the Black slaves in the nineteenth century, the Creature is denied formal education, necessitating that he teaches himself. Finally, according to Malchow, the Creature and his inclination toward revenge for Victor's (a white man's) unjust treatment is confirmation that Shelley may have intended readers to interpret the Creature as a racialized being (1).

By portraying the Creature as racialized in the 1818 novel, Shelley constructs a foundation centered on issues of race that are further developed by future adaptations that take and build upon the racial themes presented in the novel. The racialization of Shelley's Creature is deeply rooted in the 1818 novel. *Frankenstein*'s ultimate transformation first to culture-text and then to established literature means that the adaptations it influenced over time began, albeit gradually, to interpret the Creature as racialized. As Szwydky maintains, "each new iteration

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[17] Other critics, like Robert Sawyer, argue that the Creature has (stereotypically racist) Black physical features, "including the fact that the monster is not only bigger and stronger than Dr. Frankenstein but also darker and more dangerous. One of the more prevalent stereotypes was the oversized body of Negroes, which granted them great force" (22). Based on Victor Frankenstein's description of the Creature as having "yellow skin," "lustrous Black" hair, and "pearly" white teeth, Anne Mellor claims that Shelley's nineteenth-century readers would "immediately have recognized the Creature as a member of the Mongolian race" ("Racial Science" 2). Karen Piper similarly reads the Creature through a racial lens; however, she identifies his racial makeup as being Inuit since she claims the description "is hauntingly similar to the way that [Arctic] explorers described the inhabitants of Greenland" (64).

adds to the Frankenstein culture-text," incorporating this characterization into the text's canon (132). Perry and Cutchins expound on how the culture-text responds to a specific cultural moment:

> Early readers [of *Frankenstein*] were less focused on the Creature that runs amok, and more concerned with the good doctor's 'presumption.' Later nineteenth-century readers and theatregoers saw an analogue of social unrest. Mid-twentieth-century readers and viewers often focused on the fear of out-of-control technology, while scholars in the late twentieth century discovered a tale of male usurpation of the birthing process. Each of these readings would suggest a different central question and a focus on different anxieties that a Complex approach can highlight. Hence, the 'Frankenstein Complex' is constantly evolving ideologically, culturally, technologically, and generically. (8)

Cutchins and Perry rationalize how each historical moment, from the novel's early nineteenth-century inception to the twenty-first century's current popular culture, has tapped into *Frankenstein*'s plots, themes, and characters to address the various social anxieties of each era. While contributing to and overtly disrupting the Frankensteinian culture-text, LaValle engages with the novel's canon that other revisionists have molded and developed through various historical treatments. LaValle then exploits the novel's undercurrent themes of racial identity associated with the Creature's ambiguous but implied, multi-raciality.

By racializing Shelley's Creature, LaValle re-establishes a characterization implied in the text and the nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations that the novel influenced. Later nineteenth-century adaptations of *Frankenstein* reflect the plot and character revisions that became popular earlier in the century, including depicting the Creature as more savage and bestial. Critics attribute these changes to Darwin, as several adaptations during this time began to reflect

Darwinist influence and the various theories of biological evolution that developed in the mid-nineteenth century, allowing previous ambiguities about the Creature, including his possible racial makeup, to be subtly implied in theatrical adaptations.[18] Allan Smith alludes to the possible influence that Darwinism may have had on the various *Frankenstein* adaptations and their depictions of the Creature:

> The eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century emergence of biological science, making it clear that man was part of the animal kingdom and 'structurally and functionally so like the ape that no sharp distinctions could be made', served to confirm [that]…Shelley's monster belongs with such formulations, being in fact composed of a promiscuous intermixture of Bavarian human and animal body parts, [and] because of his grotesque ugliness, superhuman animal powers, and the animal/human taint of miscegenation involved in his creation; entirely the opposite of a pure line of descent. Shelley chose not to give her scientist the arguably more straightforward route of reanimation of a dead human body: her choice of an assemblage of various human and animal parts introduces the issues attached to cross-racial and even cross-species reproduction. (211)

Darwin's work on human development, considered radical for the period, inspired an inherent fear of human degeneration within Victorian society. The characterizations of Frankenstein's Creature in the various nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations of Shelley's novel have prompted interpretations of an implied racialization of the Creature, highlighting the text's

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[18] Patrick Brantlinger contends: "In the late 1700s and early 1800s, what has come to be called 'race science' or 'scientific racism' was beginning to emerge as an offshoot of natural history, a vast field that consisted of everything that Victor Frankenstein studies at the University of Ingolstadt, including chemistry, physiology, and anatomy. (An alternative name for natural history was 'natural philosophy,' the phrase Victor and his professors use to describe their areas of study.) During the 1700s, natural history was beginning to transition into the modern disciplines that included those Victor studies but also biology, zoology, and anthropology, among others" (128). Malchow further asserts, "Race itself [...] is in its most emotive sense a construct of romanticism [...] Prejudice, like the imperialism that was its crudest manifestation, worked to produce the abject degradation and dependency it expected to find in the Other" (9).

encoded racial language and discourse while also emphasizing an underlying racial message that Shelley may have intended through the Creature's portrayal as a perpetually marginalized other.[19] One of the most provocative early scenes in the text concerns Victor's pointedly racialized depiction of the Creature once he brings his creation to life:

> His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous Black and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight Black lips. (Shelley 34)

Victor subsequently compares the "horror of that countenance" to a mummy and laments that the unfinished Creature who, "was ugly then," is even more repulsive when the Creature's "muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion," suggesting that the Creature's movements make him even more threatening based solely on his physical appearance (Shelley 35). According to Allan Smith, Victor's "description positions the Creature within the relays of racial discourse popularized in the seventeenth century and persistent throughout the eighteenth, whereby the racial Other was identified as grotesque and of a lower order," inferring that the Creature's

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[19] On the topic of the Creature and race, David Hirsch argues that the Creature strongly represents a racial other and that this representation is associated with the European colonization of Africa and the West Indies during Shelley's time (23). Robert Sawyer adds to this writing specifically about the Creature's perpetual othering by Victor and society, asserting that the Creature is a "racialized outsider" due to his isolation, lack of companionship, and his struggle to communicate (20). P.J. Brendese is even more detailed in explaining the Creature's racialization, further explaining the implications of the Creature's "yellow" skin thus: "It is telling that phenotype and corporeality are key indexes for interpreting *Frankenstein* through the prism of race. The Creature's patchwork of skin is initially described as yellow, evoking the stereotype of the Asian marauder of the time, but then darkens to an appearance likened to 'the color and apparent texture of a mummy'—that is, dark brown or black. Notably, his face is hideous, but his body is symmetrical and aesthetically pleasing "in proportion, and [. . .] beautiful" (48). His strength and height parallel descriptions of Black men in the West Indies and the explorations of West Africa with which Shelley was familiar. Stitched together from the decomposing corpses of a charnel house, he literally embodies death. Blackness has long symbolized death and unbridled sexuality in the White imaginary—and both are alive in the novel" (9).

ambiguity might signify a metaphorical illustration of the racialized body representing the other (211).

The Creature is a mixture of distinct body parts, making him *both* the self and the other. Frankenstein's "horror" and "disgust" at his creation might therefore originate from his realization that there is a disconcerting familiarity about the Creature; in other words, the creation looks too much like Frankenstein himself for comfort. Robert Sawyer makes a similar observation about Victor's portrayal of the Creature:

> The descriptions of him [the Creature] as "uncouth and distorted in [his] proportions" with "long locks of ragged hair" (181) reflect the contemporary accounts of the so-called "deformities" of some natives, accounts that also produced a fear of mongrelization of whites due to interracial marriages. Indeed, often these marriages were denounced for producing "monstrously" mixed-race children. (22)

These are the "monstrously mixed-race children" reflected in Frankenstein's Creature, at least part European, or part racial other conjoined to the white self that refuses to acknowledge racial otherness, either without or within itself. As Fred Botting suggests,

> The spectre of terror displays a curious figure of otherness, a figure of difference always hauntingly close to the subject. Sameness rather than alterity constitutes a prevailing factor in relations between East and West Jean-Pierre Dupuy observes a global 'logic' that is determined not by difference, but by 'identity similarity, imitation and fascination.' (36)

Kelly Hurley argues in a similar fashion that the Creature, as both self and other, represents the racialized abhuman, a symbol for the "disjointed Victorian identity brought to social consciousness through Darwinist theories" (5). Similarly addressing abjection, Dawn Keetley

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agrees that "the monster that embodies the abject is in many ways more threatening than the 'other' because its existence threatens not only the self but also the border between self and other" (189). This tenuous "border" between selfhood and otherness that fractures the identity in its conflicting struggle to separate itself from and be a part of monstrosity—the monstrosity represented as everything to be feared. At the same time, what is secretly desired.[20] Traditionally, this "disjointed" identity is manifested through a resistance to the monstrous. However, it is also translated as a return to, a desire for, and an acceptance of monstrosity in both self and the other.

The contentious identity politics involved in identifying monstrosity, or that "revolting doppelgänger" within oneself, transforms how the cultural structure signifies monstrosity as normal, or not, in the social paradigm (Brendese 10). Speaking on this contradiction and its relationship to the monstrous body as a site of horror, Keetley posits, "Indeed, so many of the monstrous bodies of horror are hybrids, unnatural conjoining of opposites, formless blobs, massed collectives. And they all […] push beyond the boundaries of the known" (185). Hybridity confounds naturality in monstrous bodies that society pushes outside the borders of the normative structure. In that case, the Black body, often comprised of that "monstrous mix" of Blackness and whiteness, embodies opposition through its persistent interraciality. The Black body specifically is frequently identified as a location of monstrous horror, or as Keetley asserts, "monsters most often emerge from those impulses and people who are 'Othered' by society,"

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[20] In his influential study on horror films, Robin Wood contextualizes monstrosity through the basic cinematic trope of the Monster and its relationship to normality. Wood claims that the Monster is a clear symbol of otherness. In the context of horror, the Monster is a fluid entity that is "changing from period to period as society's fears clothe themselves in fashionable or immediately accessible garments" (73). Adam Lowenstein defines *monstrosity* as "transformative otherness" or what he considers "horror's ability to cast social difference as a matter of ongoing metamorphoses across 'normal' self and 'monstrous' other, where the struggle to acknowledge other and self as fundamentally intertwined is never resolved and always renewed" (6). P.J. Brendese adopts Aimé Césaire's term "monstrous ingratitude" to connect monstrosity "to rebellion, revolution, or a revolt against a parent or benefactor," an underlying theme that Brendese argues directly speaks to race and the rebellious slave narrative that he claims Shelley's novel evokes (2).

primarily those who are racially or ethnically different from the cultural majority (188).

Therefore, in a social structure dominated by whiteness, society reduces Blackness to

monstrosity. These social constructs that value whiteness mark people of color as monsters;

however, these same cultural structures, which refuse to accept the Black body, also cannot resist

its appeal. Appropriately, Keetley employs the Frankensteinian myth to illustrate how Black

people, particularly Black men, are systematically reduced to monstrosity, as she opines that

"whether a crime occurs adjacent to them […] or whether Black men act heroically to save

others and themselves, they are all subject, at any moment, to being reduced to monstrous

versions of Frankenstein's creation, nonhuman, monstrous 'things'" (188). However, as Keetley

astutely observes, "monsters can also be embraced as a means of becoming something new"

(194). Victor LaValle simultaneously embraces and rejects Black monstrosity from this locus to

create a new space for Black embodiment within the *Frankenstein* collective.

Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*

As an intentional nod to the Creature's hybridity, LaValle constructs an unusual graphic

narrative (illustrated by Dietrich Smith and Joanna Lafuente) in *Destroyer* that joins various

components from the *Frankenstein* story and its overarching motifs with his plotline to tell a

story about racial unrest in the twenty-first century. LaValle's tale picks up where Shelley's

novel leaves off, with Frankenstein's Creature, portrayed in LaValle's text as the Destroyer

monster, still living dormant in the Arctic. However, the glaciers are melting due to climate

change and the destruction of the environment by humans enrages the Destroyer monster.

Subsequently, the Destroyer monster is more incensed when he sees a whaling ship harpoon and

kill a blue whale in the ocean where he is swimming. He brutally kills the ship's crew and

destroys the vessel. The crew of a nearby environmentalist ship that happens to be passing in the

waters near the monster initially applauds his actions. Once the environmentalist crew recognizes the Destroyer monster as Frankenstein's Creature, they treat him with honor, apprising him of the scientific and technological advancements of the past two hundred years that have been helpful and hurtful to humankind. The Destroyer erupts when he hears Victor Frankenstein's name mentioned in this review. Subsequently, the monster renews his hatred for his creator and society, initiating a rampage to eliminate humanity, starting with massacring the crew of well-meaning environmentalists. The Destroyer then charts a path of bloody destruction across the globe as he makes his way to Dr. Josephine Baker, the last descendant of the Frankenstein family.[21]

The protagonists of LaValle's narrative, Dr. Josephine Baker, a prominent scientist, and her teenage son Akai, are African Americans living an everyday life in Chicago. However, while walking home from a baseball game one night, the police shoot Akai after a white woman mistakes his baseball bat for a rifle. Due to extreme grief and anger over her son's death, Dr. Baker uses modern nanotechnology, coupled with Victor Frankenstein's journal notes, to resurrect Akai, creating the human/android hybrid "Akai-Creature." However, the story's primary antagonist, the Director, the leader of a secret governmental agency, releases the Destroyer monster and hopes to recapture him for her nefarious reasons. The Director seeks information on Dr. Baker's technological research. To that end, the Director sends agents Percy Shelley and George Byron (an obvious nod to Mary Shelley's husband and her friend who both influenced the novel) to capture Dr. Baker so the agency can obtain the doctor's groundbreaking

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[21] In a 2017 *Paste Magazine* interview on *Destroyer*, LaValle says that he is directly referencing the famous dancer in the name of his protagonist: "As for the Josephine Baker reference, I liked using her because I think many people know of her as the talented dancer and actress, but she also worked diligently on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States *and* aided the French Resistance during World War II. In other words, she was no joke. I wanted to honor that aspect of her nature with the reference" (Tobis Carroll).

technology. To control the Destroyer Creature that her agency has unleashed on the world, the Director attempts to clone Victor Frankenstein; however, the clones repeatedly disintegrate, and all attempts to replicate Frankenstein fail. Later the narrative reveals that the Director integrated Dr. Baker's ex-husband and Akai's father, Pliers into a giant robotic cyborg called The Bride to create another killing machine. LaValle's story comes to a climatic end when Dr. Baker, the resurrected Akai-Creature, and the Pliers/The Bride cyborg try to destroy the Destroyer monster; however, the monster kills both Dr. Baker and Pliers/The Bride, leaving only the Akai-Creature to defeat the Destroyer monster with nanotechnology. Although the Destroyer monster murders Akai's parents, they remain with him spiritually, speaking to him as he walks around his old Chicago neighborhood, giving him life lessons and advice on racism and the Black experience in America. At the end of the story, the Akai-Creature resumes his old pastime by attending a baseball game, looking forward to a future of fighting racism, able to live forever.

With *Destroyer*, LaValle definitively identifies the Creature's race, thereby redefining and reconstructing the culture-Creature in terms of Blackness and the Black body. To do this, LaValle initially engages with the Frankensteinian culture-text, adopting the traditional iconography often associated with the culture-monster, giving his Destroyer monster iconographic features that are more consistent with the culture-text than any characteristics of Shelley's Creature established in the 1818 novel. For instance, the opening image depicts the Destroyer monster in the Arctic sitting on top of a polar ice cap, keeping with the Creature's final location in the closing moments of the 1818 book (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Opening image of the Destroyer monster sitting on a polar ice cap in the Arctic (LaValle, Chap.

1). See Appendix F for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

LaValle depicts the Destroyer as muscular, unrealistically fit, and super heroic. However,

his body displays iconic suturing that implies the stitching together of various body parts that

LaValle incorporates from the traditional culture-Creature characterizations. Additionally, as in

previous *Frankenstein* adaptations, LaValle's Destroyer is diminished from the articulate,

philosophical, and sensitive character of Shelley's 1818 novel to the nonspeaking, voiceless

character (the Destroyer Creature only says one word, "destroy," throughout the entire comic book, repeating it three times) popularized in contemporary representations of the Creature. [22]

Although LaValle accepts certain iconic elements, like the suturing and inarticulation, from the culture-Creature, what is particularly intriguing is that LaValle eventually unmakes the culture-text monster by killing and deconstructing the Destroyer as a symbol of a historical past that now needs modernizing. When considering the relationship between the culture-text and the adaptation, Yvonne Griggs contends:

> Re-visionist adaptations […] can also attain their own place within that canon: they are neither consumed by nor solely defined by it but rather present us with other manifestations of cultural anxieties that circulate around the initiating canonical text and its various adaptations. The canonization of texts is, like adaptation itself, an ongoing process that reacts to and interacts with the cultural and critical preoccupations of its time of production. (8)

Initially, LaValle is simply recycling the "society creates monsters" premise often associated with the analysis of *Frankenstein*. However, LaValle subverts the textual representations in ways that take his narrative back to Shelley's 1818 themes with a new perspective. The depiction of the Destroyer monster, whose physical features LaValle takes from both the culture-monster and his own creative rendering, demonstrates how he addresses the issue of the *Frankenstein* culture-text. LaValle initially embraces, then rejects, and finally disrupts the traditional representations of the culture-monster. What is even more interesting is that LaValle disrupts the conventional

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[22] The Destroyer's lack of speech is briefly explained in a flashback scene in Chapter 2 of the *Destroyer* graphic novel. According to this scene, in 1799, the Destroyer is traveling through the woods of Ireland. He comes upon a group of men by a campfire and attempts to ask them for help, but the men violently attack the Destroyer and shoot an arrow in his mouth. A concluding cell in this scene depicts the Destroyer grasping at his throat, presumably injured enough to limit his speech. In this scene, LaValle explains why the Destroyer wants revenge on humankind and why he travels the world, killing indiscriminately.

culture-text monster using the Black body, the resurrected Akai-Creature, to signify an evolution of the culture-monster necessitated in the twenty-first-century cultural moment of Black protests associated with and responding to police brutality. The Akai-Creature, reanimated from the dead, epitomizes a new and future-forward portrayal of the Frankenstein Creature, closer in interpretation to Shelley's 1818 Creature.

LaValle racializes the Creature to convey a social critique about Blackness in the twenty-first century. However, the Destroyer, still motivated by revenge, targets all humanity: men, women, and children. Here, LaValle relegates the Creature back to the symbolic role of the monstrous other that plays so well to the racist stereotypes associated with Blackness in American society.[23] In Shelley's novel, the Creature longs for companionship and an emotional connection to humanity, but in LaValle's reimaging the Destroyer becomes a heartless killing machine with an intense aversion to humans. He travels the world, murdering indiscriminately, to tackle issues he views as social injustices. With these violent acts, the Destroyer blatantly displays the monstrosity so often associated with Frankenstein's creation, and LaValle's vivid illustrations add to the impact of the Destroyer's ruthless actions. A particularly graphic scene in Chapter 1 depicts the Destroyer as he suddenly appears on a whaling ship, attacks the crew members, punches a hole through one crew member's body, and rips out his heart. The Destroyer violently murders the entire crew for their role in killing a whale and polluting the environment (see Figure 3).

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[23] According to Keetley, "Twenty-first century horror is replete with monsters that yearn to shore up inequitable systems of power, often harking back to a sense of order and tradition that is in the process of vanishing" (191).

Figure 3. A panel depicting the Destroyer monster ripping out a crew member's heart (LaValle, Chap. 1). See Appendix G for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

A subsequent scene in Chapter 2 depicts the Destroyer at the Mexican-American border wall, where he commits another act of savage vengeance by bringing down a section of the wall on a group of immigrants who believe the Destroyer is assisting them in entering the country. Mistaking the monster as their guardian angel, the immigrants follow him until they discover too late that he will not help them. Instead, the Destroyer murders the immigrants before they can reach potential freedom in the U.S., and through his disregard for humanity, the Destroyer extinguishes the immigrants hopes for a new life (see Figure 4).

The Destroyer materializes intermittently throughout the graphic novel, emerging periodically to create chaos and destruction. This demonstrates the sharp contrast between the Destroyer, a re-embodiment of the culture-monster, and Akai, as the sympathetic and hopeful antithesis thereof.

Figure 4. The Destroyer monster pushes a piece of the boarder wall down onto immigrants crossing from Mexico to the United States (LaValle, Chap. 1). See Appendix H for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

For Akai, humanity is worth saving, and the last scene of the graphic novel—in which he is just a young boy enjoying a baseball game—implies that hope lies in this new creation, now immune to the racist society that initially destroyed him (see Figure 5).
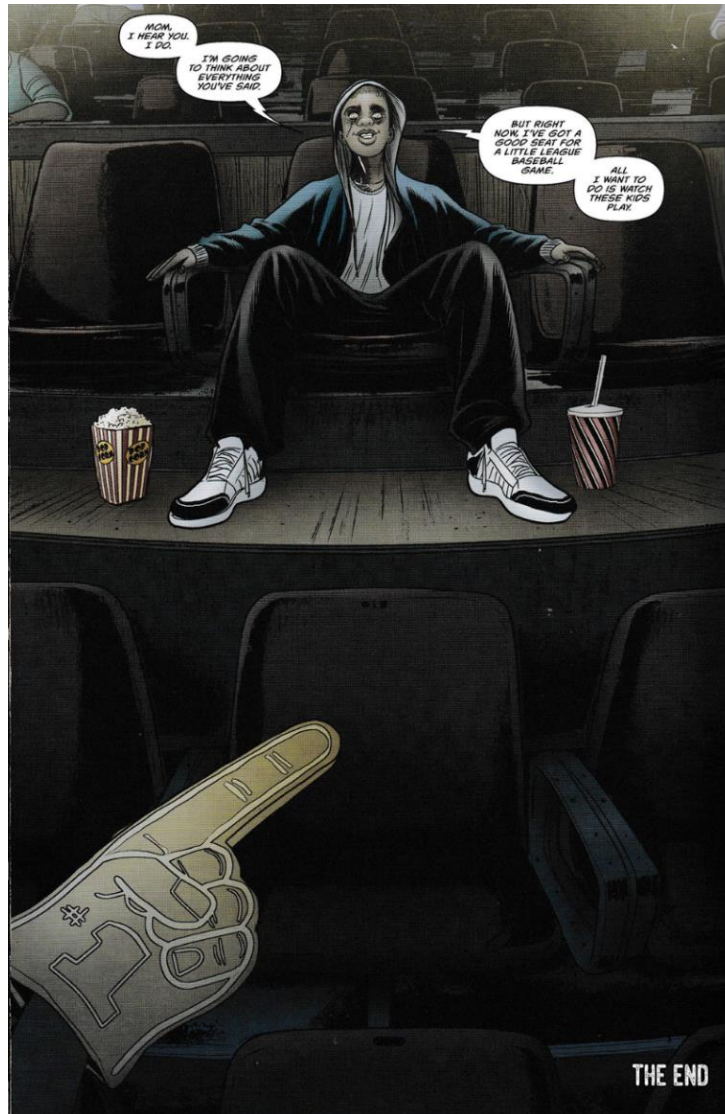
Figure 5. The Akai-Creature peacefully enjoying a baseball game at the end of the graphic novel (LaValle, Chap. 6). See Appendix I for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

This final image fulfills LaValle's apparent purpose: to undermine the current Frankensteinian culture-text. It returns the reader to a version of Shelley's Creature through Akai that disrupts the monstrosity in the text and relocates the Creature, repositioning him in a more socially conscious space within the narrative.

The Akai-Creature as a Racialized Body

By altering the culture-text, LaValle refuses to accept the contemporary cultural tradition that continues to depict the "standard" Frankenstein monster. As such, LaValle displaces the culture-monster by remaking the character in terms of the Black body: he replaces the culture-monster with the Akai-Creature, a literal signification of Blackness, whose scientist mother brings him back to life after the police kill him.

LaValle uses the Akai-Creature as a twenty-first-century version of Frankenstein's Creature to address the problems of racial violence and police brutality against Black males in America. In several flashback scenes in Chapter 5 of the graphic novel, LaValle uncovers the events that led up to Akai's shooting in some detail: they boy is walking through a predominantly white neighborhood after a baseball game with his bat over his shoulder; a white woman looking out her window mistakes his bat for a rifle; she calls the police, and they shot and kill Akai. These events are similar to the actual shooting of 12-year-old Tamir Rice in 2014, whose killing, along with many other young black boys and men, inspired the Black Lives Matter movement.[24] In fact, LaValle explains in an *Entertainment Weekly* interview that he expressly made Akai the same age as Tamir Rice and used Akai Gurley, another young Black boy killed by the police, as inspiration for the character's name (Breznican). It is only after LaValle introduces the reader to Akai, drawn with noticeable sutures that appear to stitch up his body parts (an apparent reference to Creature iconography from the culture-text,) that LaValle reveals the story of the boy's violent death (see Figure 6).

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[24] Tamir Rice was shot and killed by two white police officers in a Cleveland, Ohio, park when his toy gun was mistaken for a real handgun. Akai Gurley was an unarmed black man shot and killed by police in a Brooklyn, New York stairwell two days before Tamir Rice's murder.

Figure 6. The Akai-Creature's pieced together body reminiscent of the culture-text iconography (LaValle, Chap. 3). See Appendix J for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

LaValle keeps the reader in suspense to build pathos for Akai as a representation of the Black body, regarded as a threat because society cannot control it. LaValle then recharacterizes the culture-monster to resist the interpretation of the Black body as monstrous and to highlight Akai's characterization as the new Creature. In relating Akai back to Shelley's 1818 Creature, it is essential to note that what makes the culture Creature and LaValle's Destroyer monsters is the senseless and violent actions they commit within their respective narratives; however, Shelley's Creature is not a monster, since the Creature's violent acts are primarily due to his desperation, abandonment, and rejection by society (Bernatchez 207). Jeray further vindicates the 1818 Creature and rationalizes his hostility:

The Creature's actions can be all easily justified and, thus, regarded as not monstrous. If the Creature were, indeed, a moral monster, having committed the crimes, the Creature would continue to feel no remorse. He cannot be labelled as morally monstrous also because, typically, the moral monsters are those who inflict pain on others having suffered none in the first place. As cruel as some of the Creature's deeds were, they all can be to some degree excused by his motives, his pain and despair. And cruelty is not identical with moral monstrosity. This means that whatever cruelties he later performed, all of them were (at times unintentional) perversions of justice, which he saw as originally violated by his creator, cowardly and self-seeking Victor. (65)

In search of his own humanity, Shelley's 1818 Creature must resort to self-education to learn basic life principles through three classic texts: Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Sorrow of Young Werther*, and Plutarch's *Lives of Illustrious Greeks and Romans*. What the Creature learns from these texts, without guidance from his creator, are the fundamental psychological and emotional extremes: beauty versus horror, love versus hate, and good versus evil. These all manifest into what the Creature eventually becomes later in the novel. Shelley's 1818 Creature begins life as a being capable of goodness, kindness, and love; however, society's evils and the effects on him transform him into a monster.

LaValle highlights, and at times emphasizes, the monstrosity of the culture-monster in his Destroyer character to present the Akai-Creature as the antithesis to this monstrosity and undermine prevailing cultural stereotypes associated with race. According to Nancy Yousef, Shelley's Creature is a literary model of Rousseau's "noble savage" concept where individuals are born good but become corrupted by an unfair society that refuses to integrate them into its order (158). LaValle integrates Shelley's more peaceful and gentler Creature from the 1818

Frankenstein text with Akai, making the boy more sensitive and compassionate in opposition to the persistent stereotype that characterizes Black men as angry and hostile.[25] Therefore, the Black body becomes signified in Akai as he embodies the 1818 Creature that Shelley presents in the novel, and with Akai's definitive racialization, LaValle taps into much more than what previous *Frankenstein* adaptations attempted to approach. Although, at times, these adaptations do imply a racialized Creature, they do not explicitly depict the character as racial. LaValle restores the 1818 Creature in an apparent effort to contradict and resist the "angry Black boy" stereotype, a common misconception about young Black men that distorts perceptions of Blackness, making the state of being Black more threatening, easier to control, and even easier to destroy by society. LaValle resurrects the 1818 version of Shelley's Creature to get back to the novel's portrayal of the character and to authenticate, validate, and substantiate the Black body veiled in Shelley's 1818 text, making the 1818 Creature an accessible metaphor that contemporary revisionists, like LaValle, can use to address modern social issues. LaValle restores the Creature's "innocence" lost in previous adaptations through his rendering of Akai, who represents hope for humanity as an indestructible cyborg that society cannot destroy. Akai, as the cyborg Frankenstein's Creature, reanimated and empowered with nanotechnology, is a combination of both the past and the present; however, instead of this dual identity being disorienting, LaValle attempts to make the Akai-Creature familiar rather than othered.

In describing the 1818 Creature's perceived virtue, as it appears earlier in the novel, Schor notes that "While the sinister, lowered brow [of the Creature] may intimate a vicious

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[25] Ample scholarship notes the kindness the Creature initially exhibits early in the *Frankenstein* text. Jeray remarks, "It is possible, however, to prove that the Creature, indeed, was good, kind-hearted, well-wishing, sincere and benevolent; thus, it is possible to surmise that in the Shelleyan rendering, if given loving company, he would have surely developed his virtuousness [...] The Creature's cruelty came from despair, but he was not malicious or malevolent by nature" (66-67). Robert Sawyer agrees, claiming, "Even the early 19th-century critics [had] sympathy with the monster [as] justice is indisputably on his side" (20).

destiny, the Monster's open, upturned hands suggest innocence, receptivity, helplessness" (70).

LaValle utilizes the suggested innocence of the 1818 Creature when he embodies the same

qualities in Akai, who is as a reinterpretation of this Creature, an antithesis to the Destroyer. To

further substantiate Akai's integrity in contrast to the Destroyer's brutality, LaValle negates the

Frankensteinian culture-text mythos concerning the Creature having a criminal's brain, implying

that the Creature is technically "a born criminal."[26] LaValle mitigates this piece of culture-text

iconography by decriminalizing the Akai-Creature, who, ironically, as a young Black male, is

racially profiled as a criminal threat and unlawfully murdered by the police because his baseball

bat is mistaken for a rifle.

LaValle remakes the Frankensteinian culture-text to provide space for the Black body,

implying that the current culture-monster, whose racialization is only hinted at (i.e., by

possessing green skin) in most adaptations that adhere to the culture-text, is no longer adequate

to speak to race in the twenty-first century. LaValle reinvents the culture-monster in Akai to get

back to Shelley's 1818 Creature, who is a more compassionate and caring figure. Speaking on

the "seemingly new narratives" associated with adaptations that add to the culture-text, Cutchins

and Perry contend that these adaptive media "are constructed from pre-existing pieces, pieces

drawn from a complex system of related texts and Shelley's novel is not the only source for these

pieces" (2). Destroying the culture-monster makes way for the Black body, which can speak

better to the racial injustice perpetrated on Blacks that Shelley only hints at in her novel and that

early adaptations only briefly address. LaValle's recharacterization of Frankenstein's Creature

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[26] In the 1931 *Frankenstein* film, Henry (Victor) Frankenstein's assistant Fritz mistakenly steals a criminal's brain (labeled in the film as "Dysfuncto Cerebri," or "abnormal brain") for the Creature, and this explains the Creature's irrational behavior. Paul Mitchell suggests that this originates from the motif of the Creature's transplanted brain being diseased, a common element in *Frankenstein* iconography (7).

acts as a metaphor for change that resists patterns of racial discrimination and systematic racism involving Black people.

To reinvent the Black body by opposing its othering as the monstrosity, LaValle moves Akai away from the culture monster in two primary ways. First, LaValle recharacterizes the culture monster by repositioning Akai closer to Shelley's 1818 Creature, whose sensitive, humane persona makes him noticeably more human and less monstrous than the dominant interpretations of the Creature. The second aspect of unmaking that LaValle attempts creates space for the Akai Creature within the culture-text by destroying the culture-monster manifested in LaValle's Destroyer, which thereby symbolizes a complete supplantation of the culture monster or the Creature as a monstrous being. As such, LaValle simultaneously amends/revises the culture-text, making it more relevant to the current twenty-first-century moment that has no use for the Frankenstein *monster* as the modern period requires Shelley's 1818 novel *Creature*. For LaValle, the Frankensteinian myth presents more literary and social value if the monster is usurped for the sake of humanity, represented by the 1818 novel's Creature, a characterization never accessible in the current Frankensteinian culture-text.

In the twenty-first-century social moment of racial unrest associated with the demonization of Black males specifically and an attack on Black masculinity in general, it becomes vital for LaValle to make Akai, a young Black boy, into the image of the 1818 textual Creature. What LaValle does with his recharacterization of the Frankensteinian text is mimic the Black Lives Matter movement's attempts to eliminate the deleterious notions that Black men are inherently violent monsters, and that Black masculinity is a hideous "thing" to be feared and suppressed within the social construct. Therefore, LaValle's Akai-Creature emerges as the embodiment of Shelley's 1818 Creature to resist the pervasive racist stereotype that demonizes

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Blackness and characterizes Black men as both literal and figurative monstrosities. By rejecting this racist characterization and restoring the 1818 Creature to the culture-text, LaValle goes further into the past (Shelley's 1818 Creature) to resist the present (culture-monster) and remake the literary and cultural future (Akai-Creature) to pave an alternative course for the Frankensteinian culture-text's development.

The question then becomes, where does this leave the Black body manifested through the part human, part android Akai-Creature, who, as a human-cyborg amalgam, interestingly goes beyond the cross-raciality of the human/animal hybrid Creature presented in the 1818 text? What exactly has LaValle made space for in the Frankensteinian culture-text by remaking the Creature? Instead of presenting the audience with a complete flashback to the Frankensteinian Creature/monster, LaValle moves the myth ever forward with visions of the future. This future seeks to humanize men of color rather than demonize them based on racist notions of Black masculinity. Although Akai is both living and dead, flesh and machine, the text repeatedly shows examples that confirm his humanity and refute or repudiate his monstrosity. By deposing the culture-monster, a violent and destructive figure frequently utilized to substantiate prior racial stereotypes of Blackness, LaValle creates a space for a modernistic iteration of the 1818 Creature in Akai, deconstructing a former incarnation of Frankenstein's monster no longer needed in the contemporary social moment.

Something that adds an extra dimension to LaValle's Akai-Creature is the character's cybernetic makeup. Ironically, LaValle resurrects Akai as posthuman to make him *more* human than the Destroyer monster or the culture-monster, further signifying how the Akai-Creature represents the future of Shelley's Creature and the culture-text. In the final scenes of LaValle's novel, Akai defeats the Destroyer using the nanotechnology that his scientist mother, Dr. Baker,

had integrated into his body when she reanimated him from the dead. Dr. Baker uses the "nanobots" to compensate for the missing parts of Akai's body that the police destroyed when they shot him. It has become common in literary studies to read Frankenstein's Creature through cyborg theory, and critics posit that this insight puts us closer to understanding our own tenuous relationship with contemporary technology. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly examine this scholarship, particularly Donna Haraway's influential theories on the cyborg and human-machine hybridity relating to *Frankenstein*'s literary analysis.

Haraway explains the blending between man and machine with her cyborg theory, which she argues represents the "disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collection and personal self" (33). According to Haraway, the mixed creation of modern technology, part human and machine, explores the boundaries where personal identities intersect. Although Haraway uses this theory to define the duality of the "cyber" female and the relationship between feminism and technology, scholars have applied her critical approach to Shelley's text as further clarification for the relationship between Frankenstein and his Creature. Haraway claims we should embrace our contradictions or accept the familiar and the unfamiliar simultaneously. As such, according to Haraway, original unity of identity is a myth, and there is no pure identity that separates man from machine. In other words, man and machine are unified and are one, thereby redefining what we consider identity and who we think we are as humans. Sarah Fuller contributes an intriguing postscript to Haraway's assumptions, as Fuller claims that reading *Frankenstein* through cyborg theory reveals that the Creature is the essential myth of man/machine synthesis and argues, "the Creature [...] appears in many ways to be just the sort of boundary-confusing cyborg Haraway finds so liberating" (217). If we read *Frankenstein* alongside cyborg theory, we see that post-humanity or the human-technological hybridity manifested in characters like Shelley's Creature

can actually be "liberating," signifying a progressive rather than regressive event that propels the human (body) forward into a new space.

LaValle consciously engages cyborg theory with the Frankensteinian culture-text to demonstrate that Akai's post-humanity—as technology integrated with Shelley's Creature—makes the Akai-Creature more connected to his humanity. Rather than being a restrictive force, Akai's post-humanity presents the possibility for a liberating moment that signals a prominent space for the Black body within a distinctly future-forward Frankensteinian culture-text that better reflects a more racially conscious twenty-first-century society. It is no coincidence that LaValle situates his text from this cyborg vantage point, as he consistently engages with various literary theories throughout his graphic narrative, giving substance to his contributions to the culture-text even as he makes it more contemporarily applicable. By recovering Shelley's 1818 Creature and displacing the culture-text monster with the high-tech Akai-Creature, LaValle figuratively "reboots" the Frankensteinian myth, treating the Creature as a transformative entity. In so doing, LaValle upgrades the motifs, tropes, and characteristics commonly associated with Shelley's Creature to modify them for the future, adding the next level to and leveling up the *Frankenstein* culture-text. With the Akai-Creature, LaValle creates an updated version of the culture-monster to mimic what is happening with race on a cultural level, in much the same way that Shelley did with the racial undertones she incorporated into the 1818 novel.[27]

When evaluating the cyborg concept in the context of LaValle's remaking of Shelley's Creature, the Akai-Creature, a Black human/cyborg hybrid, can also be examined through an

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[27] Celena Jeray says, "Both Mary Shelley and her father, William Godwin, openly condemned the racial prejudice in their contemporaries and often expressed their animosity against the slave trade. Godwin's tales, which mocked racism, and his general disapproval of such practices might have also inspired his daughter to depict the Creature as suffering from oppression and intolerance" (60).

Afrofuturistic lens. LaValle's character conjures up conventional science fiction motifs that he

subverts to speak to the past, present, and particularly the future of the Black diaspora.[28] As a

persistent science fiction trope depicted throughout modern media, the cyborg presents a

futuristic embodiment of Blackness that serves as an impending respite from racial inequality,

discrimination, and injustice in some distant time.[29] Additionally, according to Tiffany Barber:

> Afrofuturist works also aim to subvert science fiction tropes to highlight and complicate
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> issues of racial difference and representations of blackness that are often left out of
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> generic plots or eclipsed altogether. These issues and representations include the
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> structured absence and token presence of black characters and actors, themes of racial
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> contamination and racial paranoia as constitutive of a postapocalyptic future, and the
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> traumatized black body as the ultimate signifier of difference, alien-ness and
>
> otherness. (136-37)

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[28] The term "Afrofuturism" was devised by Mark Dery in 1994 to describe "speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture – and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future […]" (180-81). Reynaldo Anderson and Charles Jones define Afrofuturism as, "the early twenty-first century technogenesis of black identity reflecting counter histories, hacking […] appropriating the influence of network software, database logic, cultural analytics, deep remixability, neurosciences, enhancement and augmentation, gender fluidity, posthuman possibility, the speculative sphere with transdisciplinary applications has grown into an important Diasporic techno-cultural Pan African movement" (137). Gavin Steingo defines Afrofuturism in the context of slavery and alienation, explaining that: "Afro-futurism developed largely as a response to the condition of forced diaspora—of transatlantic slavery [...] Many argue, in fact, that Afro-futurism derives its affective and political force by allegorizing conditions of slavery through the metaphor of the alien" (46). Further adding to the definition, Leslie Larkin explains that "We might define Afrofuturism in this way: an artistic and intellectual movement of the African diaspora that draws from a range of speculative techniques in order to articulate complex counternarratives of past, present, and future and to enable the creation of a more just world" (3).

[29] In her historical overview of Afrocentrism, Lisa Yaszek mentions the influence of traditional texts, claiming: "The history of Afrofuturist storytelling both parallels and intersects that of science fiction. Science fiction scholars generally agree that science fiction developed from the scientifically- and technologically inspired stories of classic 19th-century authors including Mary Shelley and H.G. Wells in Great Britain, Jules Verne in France, and Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne in the United States" (44). According to Yaszek, these texts laid the foundation for the speculative fiction that emerged in modern times.

Most Afrofuturistic literature emphasizes Afrodiasporic people and their subsequent alienation from some native state. With his innovative conception of Afrofuturism, Mark Dery expounds on this Black estrangement from nativity, contending that "African Americans, in a very real sense, are the descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen, but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on Black bodies" (180). While Afrofuturism is a means to address past diasporic trauma, it also serves as an apparatus to control the future. LaValle restores the Black body to what Lisa Yaszek calls "a future imaginary" or to a space forward in time, a speculative location where the Black body and technology integrate to transport Blackness into the future (43). As such, La Valle uses technology to fortify the Black body, and at the same time, he employs Blackness, transforming the human Akai, who police kill only because of his race, into the Black cyborg. This Afrofuturistic metaphor represents the association between racial and ethnic identity and technology that "combines science fiction elements to imagine alternate worlds with regard to racial politics and belonging. In so doing, it is seen as a way to make sense of the past and its relevance to our black political present" (Barber 136). The Akai-Creature represents the "prosthetically enhanced future," or a prospective time or space where a technologically enhanced Black body is safeguarded against racism (Dery 180).

The (Black) human/cyborg synthesis gives the Black body a definitive identity. In the Akai-Creature's case, he is reinforced by an impenetrable body that a racist society can no longer destroy. He also cannot be controlled by the white domination that the 200-year-old Destroyer monster symbolizes. Afrofuturist works also aim to subvert science fiction tropes to highlight and complicate issues of racial difference and representations of Blackness that are often left out

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of generic plots or eclipsed altogether. These issues and representations include the structured absence and token presence of Black characters and actors; themes of racial contamination and racial paranoia as constitutive of a postapocalyptic future; and the traumatized Black body as the ultimate signifier of difference, alien-ness, and otherness (Barber 137). Envisioning a future where technology protects and preserves Blackness rather than destroying it, Dr. Baker integrates super-advanced nanotechnology into the Akai-Creature's traumatized body so that he can defeat the Destroyer. Dr. Baker's use of technology to fight racial oppression and dominance for the sake of her murdered son demonstrates an additional instance of the intersection between science fiction and the Afrodiasporic tradition that LaValle, either consciously or unconsciously, inserts into his plotline. It is through the Akai-Creature that LaValle reconstructs Blackness. In this post-humanistic existence, the Black body becomes a superior being, a progeniture to a Black evolutionary process that resolves the diasporic trauma associated with slavery, racial discrimination, and violence. In this new cybernetic persona, the Black body, as the Akai-Creature, can possess full control and complete autonomy, as Blackness that was missing in the past is re-established in a future space.

Reconsiderations

As a cultural construct, the Frankensteinian culture-text remains an influential source for a diverse variety of contemporary *Frankenstein* adaptations accessible in various styles and genres. From a historical perspective, the adaptability and continued afterlife of the Frankenstein story allows it to occupy a prominent position in existing culture and provide modern revisionists, like Victor LaValle with his imaginative alterations in *Destroyer*, the autonomy to reinterpret Shelley's novel and characters to speak on and to various social concerns. In repurposing the Frankenstein myth, LaValle unmakes, displaces, and frequently disrupts popular

(mis)conceptions as he recenters the story's focus on twentieth/twenty-first- century racial unrest and injustice. However, LaValle does not just re-focus the *Frankenstein* text with his contributions; he specifically reconfigures the common fallacies related to the Creature. Most importantly, by re-establishing Shelley's 1818 Creature in terms of race and restoring the character back to the persona and figure (in every sense of the word) described by Shelley, LaValle carves out a definitive space for Blackness and the Black body within the culture-text. He moves the *Frankenstein* "popular culture machine" into the future while simultaneously reconnecting with the novel's disregarded and often forgotten past.

CHAPTER TWO:

BLACK MALE-ING HEATHCLIFF: EMBODYING BLACKNESS IN

ANDREA ARNOLD'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* (2011)

Emily Brontë's magnum opus, *Wuthering Height*s (1847) is, like Mary Shelley's

Frankenstein, a nineteenth-century Gothic novel that prominently features a character, or more

specifically as Adele Hannon describes, a "gothic villain" whose questionable identity invites

various interpretations (221).[30] According to Hannon, "the gothic villain functions as a reminder

of social groups that exist on the margins of society whom, to many observers, are viewed as the

[…] Other, a distortion that interrupts the normative progression of the homogenous space"

(221). Both Frankenstein's Creature and Heathcliff are portrayed as disruptive signifiers of

otherness and for this reason are considered villains, frequently labeled as "fiends" and

"monsters" in their respective novels.[31] Because they long to be included in a society that harshly

rejects them due to their fluid identities, both characters commit monstrous acts in response to

being abandoned, abused, and rejected by a violent culture that helps cultivate monstrosity

through its systematic discrimination and oppressive institutions.

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[30] The defining elements of the Gothic novel include atmospheres of horror, mystery, decay, and death, disturbing nightmares, dark and foreboding surroundings, omens and curses, and supernatural or inexplicable events. Gothic characters, such as monsters, ghosts, witches, demons, and vampires, are also aspects of traditional Gothic conventions. According to John Cuddon, these characteristic elements have remained consistent across different media and help define the Gothic genre (308–309).

[31] H.W. Gallagher notes the apparent influence of Shelley's *Frankenstein* on Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, asserting the strong parallels between Frankenstein's Creature and Heathcliff. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also make similar observations concerning the intertextuality between *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*.

While Heathcliff represents the metaphorical "creation of monsters by society" trope, what separates him from Frankenstein's Creature is that Heathcliff's monstrosity is more metaphorical, allowing him to move into, and disrupt temporarily, the social order that constantly attempts to exclude him. Hannon defines Heathcliff as a symbol of monstrosity, asserting, "Heathcliff functions as the 'outsider' or 'monster' due to his representation as the unidentified intruder within the familiar domestic space" (222). Later, Hannon doubles down on delineating Heathcliff as the metaphorical monster, maintaining that "due to the exclusory politics performed against him, Heathcliff is refused identity and firmly positioned on the fringe of society, where he must exist as the foreign monster" (223). Heathcliff's monstrosity appears to address social issues associated with race and colonial oppression, or as Fred Botting emphasizes, "the use of 'monster' as metaphor enables the interrogation of social or intellectual problems: monsters embody fear or excitement, and monstrosity represents amoral or uncontrolled behaviour" (23). To Botting's point, the site of the monstrosity that Heathcliff embodies is a compelling space since it can evoke both fear and excitement, disgust and desire, indicating the contradictory nature inherent in monsters and Gothic villains like Heathcliff. Kristen Wright builds on this contradiction, acknowledging that "we withdraw from that which disgusts us, and we move toward that which is desirable" (vii). For this reason, Wright says, "Man has always had, and probably will always have, a love/hate relationship with the monstrous because the monsters that we create reflect our deepest forbidden desires" (ix). Speaking specifically about Heathcliff's monstrous desirability, Stefanie Krüger goes further, claiming that Heathcliff, as the "attractive villain," has a sexual "air of attraction" connected to his monstrosity, and his monstrous actions enhance rather than diminished this allure. Krüger maintains, "No matter how much Heathcliff despises other human beings he is surrounded by female characters who crave his love" (136).

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Modern audiences, primarily influenced by William Wyler's 1939 over-glamorized film version of *Wuthering Heights,* interpret the story as a quintessential romance and, therefore, romanticize the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine. However, Brontë's novel depicts, in one form or another, occasions of extreme domestic violence, instances of physical and mental torture, and overt acts of child abuse, perpetrated against Heathcliff as the racialized outsider who manages to infiltrate the Heights community. Brontë blurs the lines between the passion, violence, and hatred that ultimately leads to Heathcliff's cruelty, or as Graeme Tytler notes: "It is, accordingly, not difficult to see why Heathcliff, beaten up or whipped as he has so often been by Hindley and Joseph in his youth, should as an adult now and again deem physical punishment a suitable way of dealing with those who have in some way offended or angered him" ("Violence" 264). Therefore, unsurprisingly, the abuse that Heathcliff suffers during his childhood leads to his own abusive and violent behavior as an adult, signifying his metamorphosis into a cruel, vengeful tyrant to the characters in his orbit later in the novel. The subject of violence in Brontë's text illustrates in what manner brutality begets brutality and how the violence inflicted by society makes metaphorical monsters of those disenfranchised from the social order.

Film director Andrea Arnold seizes upon the themes of violence and abuse prevalent in *Wuthering Heights* as she explicitly depicts scenes of sadomasochistic cruelty in the interactions between the main characters in her 2011 film adaptation of Brontë's novel. Rather than avoiding the obvious socio-political issues of racial oppression and white supremacy in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British culture that previous *Wuthering Heights* film adaptations seem to ignore, Arnold magnifies these social concerns within her film and, therefore, commands viewers' attention to these subjects which remain highly problematic in contemporary society.

By presenting the film from Heathcliff's point of view, while he frequently watches the other characters from a distant periphery, Arnold subverts the original novel's narrative structure. She forces the audience to watch and sympathize with Heathcliff as a permanent outsider. Arnold positions Heathcliff on the outer fringes of Yorkshire society much like Brontë does in the novel; however, the filmmaker unequivocally raises the stakes with her adaptation by casting Black actors (Solomon Glave and James Howson) in the role of Heathcliff, whose character Arnold reimagines as an abandoned enslaved African.[32] Arnold uses this controversial casting choice to embody the textual word through Heathcliff as she creates a new space of inclusion for Blackness in the story to highlight the socio-political issues associated with eighteenth-and nineteenth-century racism and colonialism implicit in Brontë's source novel. Using Kamilla Elliot's "incarnational theory" of adaptation as a primary theoretical source, in this chapter, I will analyze how Arnold's film adaptation amplifies the themes of violence and abuse that underlie Brontë's novel and how the filmmaker's embodiment of Heathcliff, an enslaved African signifies an adaptive turn in reimaging Brontë's character to address the mental and physical effects of racial violence on people of color in both the past and present.

Heathcliff's Otherness

Who Heathcliff is, exactly, remains a persistent question within *Wuthering Heights* scholarship, or as Heather Nielson appropriately summarizes Heathcliff's character: "He is […] a fusion - or confusion - of both the archetypal hero and villain of the Gothic mode" or a personification of the "barbaric manipulator for the other inhabitants of the Heights and the Grange [..]" (80). Conscious of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial dynamics associated with British imperialism prevalent during her time, Brontë locates the topic of race

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[32] By depicting Heathcliff with African heritage, Arnold's film follows the current trend of Neo-Victorian adaptations that cast actors of color in roles traditionally played by white actors.

and ethnicity at the forefront *of Wuthering Heights*, further confounding Heathcliff's

characterization and promoting modern scholars to continue querying Heathcliff's ambiguous

racial background and ethnic makeup.[33] While issues of class and patriarchal hierarchies have

traditionally been approached when examining Brontë's novel, problems of race, ethnicity, and

interraciality are encoded within the plotline and character's interactions as well. In other words,

as Rachel Carroll points out, Heathcliff is "explicitly […] racially marked" throughout textual

and cinematic adaptations of Brontë's source text (20). However, unlike previous film

adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* that seem to tiptoe around the issue surrounding Heathcliff's

ethnicity, Arnold's film attempts to answer the question of Heathcliff's ethnic identity by

featuring two Afro-Caribbean actors in the role. Arnold's explicit racialization of Heathcliff

moves the character even farther away from the members of the white patriarchal structure that

makes up Wuthering Heights. Arnold embodies Heathcliff in purely racial terms without the

ethnic ambiguity presented in the novel or the subsequent film adaptations. As a racialized

character, which Arnold also notably depicts as a liberated slave, Heathcliff's ethnic diversity is

even more conspicuous to the film's modern audiences, acutely aware of the brutal markings

associated with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave abuse that Arnold prominently

displays on Heathcliff's body in several scenes. Jonathan Murray touches on both the

controversy surrounding Arnold's casting of Heathcliff and the director's possible motives for

her casting choice:

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[33] Susan Meyer explains that the "exploitative racial arrogance" the other characters exhibit against
Heathcliff reveals Emily Brontë's understanding of the "sublime irrationality of nineteenth-century British racism"
that underlies the novel's primary themes (99). According to Meyer, all four Brontë siblings often used race as a
metaphor in their writings, demonstrating their awareness of the problematic racial politics of the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries in which they were writing, and "in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë makes an extended
critique of British imperialism" (100).

The contention that individuals frequently have subhuman social status imposed upon

them as a consequence of their socioeconomic dispossession returns us to the opening

image of Arnold's *Wuthering Heights*. To date, the most obvious (and therefore talked-

about) aspect of the director's response to Brontë involves her decision to conceive of

and cast Heathcliff as a black immigrant slave. Perhaps this explains why the drawn

animal seen within the movie's first shot is tethered: this beast of burden indicates young

Heathcliff's brutally subordinated status within an early-nineteenth-century British

society underpinned by racist and imperialist ideologies. ("*Wuthering Heights*" 58)

Arnold's film makes an adaptive turn with her casting of Heathcliff, marking a departure from

the ambiguity surrounding Heathcliff's ethnicity in the novel and in previous film adaptations,

which primarily disregard racializing Brontë's character one way or the other. With her

innovative casting choice, Arnold re-establishes the unstable racial boundaries set by Brontë's

novel, and the filmmaker's adaptation adds another level of complexity to the Heathcliff

characterization, not only in his role as a Black immigrant enslaved person but also in his

position as the representational other constantly forced outside the social periphery.

Heathcliff's background and where he originates before he comes to Wuthering Heights

with Mr. Earnshaw are not apparent in the novel, and the references made to his history by the

other characters create more problems in the place of conclusive resolutions. Heathcliff's

ethnicity would seem to be all but resolved with the frequent "gypsy" references made about him

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throughout the novel.[34] However, scholars like Susan Meyer reject that Heathcliff is necessarily of gypsy ethnicity since, as she observes, the term could be a "generic designation for a dark-complexioned alien in England" (97). Meyer's assertion about Heathcliff's gypsy origins, or lack thereof, is notable when considered alongside Arnold's interpretation of Heathcliff as Black, which does not seem so far-fetched and appears to align with the trajectory of current *Wuthering Height*s criticism. Therefore, according to Meyer, there remains uncertainty about definitively identifying Heathcliff as coming from gypsy origins, as this racial classification in the nineteenth century was a universal nomenclature or pejorative label that was haphazardly applied to any person of color despite ethnicity to designate otherness within a predominately white European society.[35] The enigmatic language and often ambiguous, convoluted descriptions that Brontë utilizes to describe Heathcliff, perhaps purposely, adds to the mystery of his raciality.

Whatever Heathcliff's heritage, it is evident that he is an outsider, a racial other, who can only exist on the fringes of white British society, positioned at the lower levels of the social class structure. Heathcliff remains the perpetual outcast since he is not from the Earnshaw or Linton families, representing the various European landed gentry classes: the families represent the colonizers to Heathcliff's colonized. Heathcliff's presence at Wuthering Heights, his unexpected

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[34] Lockwood refers to Heathcliff as "a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect" upon their first meeting (Brontë 5). Mrs. Earnshaw calls Heathcliff a "gipsy brat" when he first comes to Wuthering Heights (Brontë 30). Hindley calls Heathcliff "gipsy" when Heathcliff will not relinquish a horse to him (Brontë 32). Mrs. Linton refers to Heathcliff as "a gipsy" when she first sees him, and young Isabella alludes to Heathcliff being a gypsy when she says he reminds her of a "fortune teller" (Brontë 40). Joseph, a servant like Heathcliff, calls him a "gipsy" (Brontë 68). Edgar Linton also refers to Heathcliff as a "gipsy" when Heathcliff returns to see Catherine (Brontë 74). The word "gipsy," a bastardization of the word "gypsy," is an offensive term used by the characters to denigrate Heathcliff's ethnicity. Notably, Lockwood uses the term "gypsy" when relaying the story from his perspective, a written account of the novel's events narrated by Nelly Dean. However, when Nelly takes over the narration, she uses the pejorative, referring to Heathcliff as a "gipsy" on several occasions as she tells the story ("Gypsy," def. G.1a).

[35] Abby Bardi explores the Victorian gypsy concept concerning Heathcliff, who, she argues, "impedes the flow of primogeniture and causes the temporary redistribution of the two properties in the novel," disrupting the so-called purity of the estate. This status is only rectified through Heathcliff's death (114).

first arrival, and his eventual return after he runs away create a breach in the Earnshaw familial

structure. His racial ambiguity is always at the heart of Heathcliff's actual and figurative

disruption that further destabilizes the Earnshaw household and eventually does the same to the

Linton estate. Heathcliff, as a disruptive presence in two British households, represents the dark

other feared by a nineteenth-century society apprehensive that Blackness would eventually

infiltrate the white English domestic space, or as Caroline Koegler observes, Heathcliff is "the

colonial other" or the racialized external intruder "inflicting anticolonial revenge and oppression

on the British domestic scene" (271).[36] It is within this racially discriminative culture that

Heathcliff's ethnicity, his non-whiteness, and "colonial otherness" works to his detriment in that

he is abandoned as a child, mentally and physically abused by his "adopted" family, and denied a

relationship with his lover, all due to his perceived outsider social status. Highlighting the

destructiveness of British colonialism within the racist and discriminatory Yorkshire community

that ostracizes Heathcliff, Beaumont argues, "Heathcliff is associated with various victims of

British colonialism, from displaced African slaves to itinerant Irish labourers…[and] his own

supposedly barbaric origins serve starkly to expose, by comparison, the barbarism of his civilised

new environment" (138).

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[36] Speaking on Heathcliff's disruption of white domesticity as a metaphor for the Victorian fear of the dark other's impending domestic infiltration, Meyer affirms, "Emily Brontë invokes the metaphorical link between white women and people of non-white races as she explores energies of resistance to the existing social structure. In *Wuthering Heights,* these energies have a universal resonance-they suggest the external, untamable energies that forever threaten the cozy domestic internal" (101). Hannon provides an in depth analysis on the anxiety associated with Heathcliff's disruption of the domesticity even further, when she describes him, "as the unidentified intruder within the familiar domestic space […] he becomes a manifestation of our fear of hybrid identities that refuse participation in the natural order [and] by infiltrating the domestic space, Heathcliff problematizes society's attempt to disregard the foreign Other and all that he/she represents […] Heathcliff is seen as an intrusion that despoils the perfection of domestic cleanliness and purity […] the undomesticated animal that changes the sacredness of the family unit and refuses all attempts to be trained in the customs of Victorian etiquette" (223, 226, 231). Emily Rena-Dozier highlights the violence associated with Heathcliff's disturbance of British domestic "tranquility," contending, "Heathcliff, the wild interloper, is insulted and angered by the domesticated Earnshaw and Linton families, and provoked into violent revenge, which at the end of the novel is defeated by the forces of domestication as embodied in the final union between Edgar Linton's daughter and the newly literate Hareton Earnshaw. The domestic defeats the gothic […]" (771).

The other characters' interactions with Heathcliff invariably depend upon his race, and they often highlight how different he is from the others around him. An interesting consideration is that Heathcliff is the only person of color or a different race in the Wuthering Heights community. Speaking about Heathcliff's sudden incursion into the Yorkshire community, Maija-Lisa Von Sneidern suggests, "Prior to Heathcliff's arrival, the inhabitants of the Heights and the Grange are racially pure Anglo-Saxons, representative of the yeoman and gentry classes […] When Heathcliff is introduced, the social equilibrium is upset, and the Heights becomes the inverse of a domestic ideal […]" (2). It is within this racially restrictive environment that Heathcliff faces discrimination, as the Yorkshire society excludes him and subjects him to physical and mental abuse.

Because he is racially othered, the other characters constantly refer to Heathcliff in dehumanizing terms throughout the novel. Mrs. Earnshaw calls him an "it," and Nelly Dean calls him a "dog" (Brontë 30). Hindley calls him a "monster" (Brontë 32), and Heathcliff's wife, Isabella, says he is "not a human being" (Brontë 105). Characterizing Heathcliff as animalistic, monstrous, and inhuman as the other characters consistently do corresponds to the Gothic nature of *Wuthering Heights* (a ghost story), thereby casting Heathcliff as a monstrous threat to the white society he has invaded. Viewing Heathcliff in this light reveals that he is like Frankenstein's Creature and like Bram Stoker's Dracula, who disrupts Victorian domesticity, literally and figuratively consuming the life out of the English domestic sphere. Therefore, it is not a stretch to compare Heathcliff to the traditional Gothic monsters and their tendency to disrupt the social order with their persistent otherness that goes against established social conventions. Beaumont takes the monster allusion one step further and likens Heathcliff's figurative consumption of both the Earnshaw and Linton women and properties as metaphorical

cannibalism, which serves as social commentary on the perniciousness of nineteenth-century British colonialism:

> Emily Brontë's often allusive identification of Heathcliff with the emblematic figure of the cannibal, which, historically, has functioned in imperial discourse as the ultimate emblem of enlightened civilization's dark other [...] Brontë's novel – which literary critics have frequently located within this very tradition of nineteenth-century gothic as a well-nigh canonical link between *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* – makes far more systematic use of the 'anthropophagic element' than either Shelley's or Stoker's novels. (139)

Andrew Smith and William Hughes express a similar view as they claim that it is the "domestic" Gothic that causes the most psychological disorientation in readers since "it represents a particular manifestation of the uncanny in which the 'home' now becomes […] the site of troubled sexual secrets so that far from guaranteeing safety, the domestic becomes the space through which trauma is generated" (4). Andrew Smith and William Hughes locate Bram Stoker's Count Dracula in this domestic sphere, noting that while the vampire distorts reality with his supernaturality, he simultaneously represents expressions of repressed sexual desires associated with domestic reality (5). The cannibal metaphor underscores the social disruption that Heathcliff and other dark outsiders present to the sanctity of the familial unit, and as such, there is also a solid sexual connotation inherent in Heathcliff's obsessive possession of both Catherine and Isabella. Speaking on the revenge aspect of Heathcliff's domestic disruption, Deborah Denenholz Morse argues that "the domestic space is a stage on which Heathcliff reenacts the violations he and other enslaved persons experienced" (167). Heathcliff's implied sexual power over two white women and his hunger for revenge makes him the ultimate threat to

English bloodlines, which are supposed to be "pure" but have been miscegenated with the racial other through repeated sexual exploitation of African women by their white enslavers.

There are several instances in which other characters link Heathcliff's darker skin to not only his physical uncleanliness, which Matthew Beaumont describes as "the incontrovertible fingerprint that identifies his [Heathcliff's] status as a manual labourer on the one hand and a non-European foreigner on the other," but also to his perceived evilness viewed as a defect in Heathcliff's character (142). Heathcliff's racial diversity from his all-white surroundings reduces him to no more than a physical representation of otherness, and therefore, the other characters view him through their white gaze, which reflects what the film's audience sees in his character. According to Harvey Young, the Black body as the other is associated with the "racialized look" that announces Blackness and "transforms, dislocates, imprisons, and objectifies the black body" (9). It is this objectification that informs the white gaze and limits the image of the Black body as the only impression of Blackness that "becomes a singular conceptual body within white imagination" (Young 7). bell hooks characterizes the white gaze as another level of white supremacy and its "fascination with the way white minds perceive blackness" and Black imagery as apparatuses for white consumption only (178). Considering the white gaze in Earnshaw's and Linton's interaction with Heathcliff, it becomes apparent that the white characters only view Heathcliff from a racial perspective, as the constant other. Therefore, Heathcliff's race is dependent upon a distorted conception of race and how it signifies otherness within the white social structure.

Heathcliff and the Image of Slavery

Although the darkness that the novel's characters frequently associate with Heathcliff can be more or less related to his personality and demeanor, the fact that he has a darker complexion

that differentiates him is explicit throughout the text. The circumstances surrounding Mr. Earnshaw's finding Heathcliff in Liverpool, a geographic center for the British slave trade during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have prompted modern scholars to argue that Heathcliff may be of African origin. Von Sneidern, with her foundational analysis of Heathcliff's ethnic origins, explains, "The English city with the most spirited commerce in slaves was Liverpool" during the mid-to-late eighteenth century and was the "premier slaving ports in Britain" during the time (1), and Beaumont concurs, arguing that "the image of the slave that haunts [Heathcliff's] early biography" (142). Lockwood does make an off-handed reference to Heathcliff turning "white as the wall behind him" that may call into question Heathcliff being a pure African; however, this comment directly contradicts repeated remarks concerning Heathcliff's darkness that also counters the other characters' descriptions of his racial diversity (Brontë 22). However, instead of purely African, it would also make sense to read Heathcliff as West Indian Creole since, during the late eighteenth century, the Caribbean also emerged as a popular slave trading post colonized by the Europeans, who were not averse to corrupting the native genealogies in these colonized locations with European bloodlines (Meyer 98). As such, the possibility that Heathcliff is a lighter-skinned African can makes sense if he is read as mixed-race Creole, biracial, a mixture of European and African, or a mixture of any racial hybridization. It is worth noting that Arnold's film adaptation features two British mixed-raced actors of Afro-Caribbean descent, Solomon Glave and James Howson, as young and adult Heathcliff, respectively. According to film critic David Belcher, Arnold cast Howson in the role after she was looking for a young actor matching the frequent descriptions of Heathcliff being a "gypsy" and Mr. Linton's presumption that Heathcliff is of "Lascar, or an American, or Spanish" origins in the novel (Brontë 40). Belcher also suggests, "Heathcliff in this case is played by the

black actor James Howson, perhaps a reflection of scholarly arguments that Brontë was writing about race and class in addition to sexual inequality and the dangers of revenge" ("Brontë's Lovers, Facing Even More Storms"). Although there was media attention paid to Arnold selecting "the first Black actor to play Heathcliff," Arnold's interpretation of Heathcliff as being of African descent is not that far-fetched and aligns with the current trajectory of *Wuthering Heights* criticism.[37]

Concerning Brontë's text, Mr. Earnshaw's dehumanizing language in referring to Heathcliff as "it" when Earnshaw first introduces the young boy to the family, or when most of the other characters refer to him as "dirty" and "savage," are all designations steeped in the racist discourse that were standard pejorative labels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used to describe colonized individuals, especially people of African descent.[38] During the nineteenth century, the notion that Blackness was associated with savagery and degeneration was directly related to emergent theories of human biology and evolution that were developing during the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century. According to Meyer, Emily Brontë would have been familiar with these theories, making it a possibility that the white characters' discriminatory language used against Heathcliff was born from these concepts that pervaded Victorian culture (98).

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[37] Silvia Aloisi, writing for *Reuters News Service*, says: "*Wuthering Heights* male protagonist Heathcliff is portrayed by a Black actor for the first time in Andrea Arnold's remake of one of English literature's best-known classics, screening in competition at the Venice film festival" (2011), and David Belcher for *The New York Times* writes about Arnold's film, "Heathcliff in this case is played by the Black actor James Howson, perhaps a reflection of scholarly arguments that Brontë was writing about race and class in addition to sexual inequality and the dangers of revenge" (2012).

[38] Throughout *Wuthering Heights*, the other characters describe Heathcliff with racist language. They particularly call him a "savage" and a "devil" (Brontë 23,29, 72, 86, 106, 130, 214, 216, 246). This language advances the idea that any person with darker skin is evil.

Recent scholarship has returned to solving the riddle of Heathcliff's race. For instance, Von Sneidern argues that the answer to Heathcliff's ethnicity may lie not in Lockwood's off-handed comment but in Mr. Earnshaw's 120-mile journey to Liverpool, where he claims to have found young Heathcliff "starving," "houseless," and "dumb in the streets" (Brontë 44). Von Sneidern points out,

> According to C.P. Sanger's chronology of *Wuthering Heights*, Mr. Earnshaw's walk to Liverpool occurred at the "beginning of harvest" in 1771, the eve of the Sommersett case and the Mansfield decision. In lieu of a whip for Cathy and a fiddle for Hindley, objects emblematic of the cruelty and indolence nurtured by institutionalized slavery, Earnshaw substitutes Heathcliff, "'dark almost as if it came from the devil.'" Earnshaw found "it" [...] in the streets of Liverpool where he picked it up and inquired for its owner - Not a soul knew to whom it belonged." Heathcliff's racial otherness cannot be a matter of dispute; Brontë makes that explicit […] his bloodline is unambiguously tainted by color. (2)

Of course, one could argue that there are several clues in the novel that may point to Heathcliff being Earnshaw's son or even Earnshaw's illegitimate son with a Black slave woman.[39] This would explain Mr. Earnshaw's mysterious journey to Liverpool, a prominent slave trading town in the eighteenth century during the time Brontë sets *Wuthering Heights*, and why Earnshaw readily "adopts" a strange vagabond child into his family. It would also justify Earnshaw's unusual and, at times, inexplicably favorable treatment of Heathcliff over his children, particularly over Hindley. It would further explain why Mr. Earnshaw curiously gives Heathcliff

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[39] Of course, if Heathcliff is interpreted as Earnshaw's actual son rather than an adopted foundling, then the implications of incest between him and Catherine come sharply into consideration, making their relationship both incestuous and interracial or doubly problematic within the Yorkshire culture.

the name of the Earnshaws' dead child but not the "Earnshaw" surname directly.[40] It was a frequent occurrence in the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries to deny the biracial children, as products of white enslavers and Black enslaved women, any legitimate claim on the family name or ancestral property.

There are other indications of Heathcliff's possible past enslavement, particularly Mr. Linton objectifying Heathcliff "as that strange acquisition my late neighbour made in his journey to Liverpool," which Beaumont associates with Brontë hinting that Heathcliff "may be some byproduct of the British slave trade, which wasn't abolished until 1808, several years after the most recent events to be narrated in the novel" (142-43). Beaumont goes on to equate this commodification of Heathcliff and the ways that Hindley "treats Heathcliff as a slave" as additional proof that the mystery of Heathcliff's origins might lie in the slave trade (143). Meyer puts the possibility of Heathcliff's enslavement into historical context, noting that "in 1769 the year in which Mr. Earnshaw found Heathcliff in Liverpool's streets, the city was England's largest slave trading port […]" (98).

Another sign that Heathcliff can be interpreted as a slave is Hindley's constant and brutal domination over him immediately when he enters the Earnshaw household. Heathcliff's interactions with Hindley are consummately grounded in a "master/slave" dichotomy. After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Hindley is determined to keep Heathcliff in the locus of degradation, relegating him to a servant's role even more servile than Joseph, who is in a domestic position within Wuthering Heights. According to Von Sneidern:

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[40] Interestingly, like Shelley's Creature is denied the Frankenstein family name, Heathcliff denied being called an Earnshaw. However, Heathcliff does "inherit" Wuthering Heights, albeit temporarily, a situation uncommon for his class and race. According to Meyer, Heathcliff's missing surname corresponds to his mysterious ancestry. However, it also indicates that "he is simultaneously deprived of authority and claim to ancestral ownership of the land that such a list of names establishes" (108).

After Earnshaw's death, Hindley emerges as one figure in a bondage relationship with

Heathcliff. Depicted as the "negligent," "tyrannical" (WH, 56), non-industrious, and

gratuitously cruel "master" (WH, 25), Heathcliff, too, is degraded by the relationship; he

is banished from the Earnshaws' company, deprived of education, and forced to

"continual hard work, begun soon and concluded late" (WH, 84). In drawing and

developing Heathcliff's character, Emily Brontë creates a manifestation of one Victorian

understanding of Black Africans. (3)

Returning to the film, Arnold builds on the idea of slavery that underlies the novel and visually

emphasizes the implications that Heathcliff was enslaved prior to his coming to Wuthering

Heights with her tight, close-up camera shots of his scarred back, presumably from slave

beatings, and branded initials on his shoulder that seem to suggest Heathcliff's previous

ownership to some unknown enslaver. Heathcliff's mutilated Black body that Arnold exhibits in

various scenes with almost uncanny camera glances of presumable slave abuse plays into the

"Heathcliff as slave" characterization the film overtly implies. With Arnold's conception of

Heathcliff as a Black immigrant slave, the slave/master paradigm between Hindley and

Heathcliff is more tangible in the film since the audience sees firsthand the whipping, beating,

and physical abuse that Hindley subjects Heathcliff to degrade him as a servant, based solely on

Heathcliff's raciality, or in Arnold's characterization, dependent specifically on Heathcliff's

Blackness.

Narrative Perspective in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

A notable aspect of *Wuthering Heights* is its narrative structure and the characters Brontë

assigns to tell Heathcliff's story. The Earnshaws and Lintons, other Heathcliff, push him out of

the social order and silence his voice. Nelly Dean and Lockwood, both members of white

English society, are the characters who tell his story. Considering the narrative's chronological progression, it would make more sense for Heathcliff to provide a first-person account of his complicated relationship with Catherine since he is one of the few characters still alive during the novel's events. His racial characterization makes Heathcliff's silence and lack of perspective problematic. Lockwood tells the story entirely from his perspective, presenting a problem because he is biased and unreliable. Luke Spencer asserts:

> Lockwood's perceptions are shaped by moral and aesthetic values which mark him as metropolitan ('provincialisms'), conservative ('I am habituated to consider') and, above all, middle-class ('manners ... peculiar to your class'). It is some measure of Nelly's success in countering his prejudices (some would say: because she shares many of them!) that Lockwood later finds her 'a very fair narrator' and admits 'I don't think I could improve her style.' (91)

Of course, Nelly Dean's prejudice against Heathcliff allows her to judge him only based on his physical appearance, negating objectivity from her narration. Due to Nelly's biased unreliability, Russell Goldfarb argues that she is "a liar, an eavesdropper, and a spy," character traits that duly call into question Nelly's narrative integrity (57). Goldfarb goes on to note how Nelly dehumanizes and objectifies Heathcliff, claiming, "in telling how Mr. Earnshaw brought Heathcliff to Wuthering Heights, Nelly refers to the starving, houseless little boy as an 'it' no less than fifteen times" and she further refers to young Heathcliff as "the stupid little thing," demeaning the boy's very existence within the Earnshaw household and providing additional evidence of Nelly's immediate prejudice against Heathcliff (55).

Although Brontë assigns narration to Lockwood and Nelly, the story of *Wuthering Heights* is not theirs to possess, and Brontë filters most elements of the narrative through these

two unreliable narrators who do not necessarily have firsthand knowledge of critical events, nor do they have Heathcliff's best interest in mind. Throughout the novel, Lockwood and Nelly prove their substantial prejudice against Heathcliff for various reasons. In confessing her dislike for Hindley's wife, Nelly also confesses her bias towards Heathcliff as an outsider when she tells Lockwood, "We don't in general take to foreigners here, Mr. Lockwood, unless they take to us first" (Brontë 36). Almost inhuman remembrances further confound Lockwood's and Nelly's narratives as both relay their stories with word-for-word dialogues attributed to the other characters. For Spencer, this indicates that either Lockwood, Nelly, or both embellish Heathcliff's history for a good story. Nicholas Frangipane questions why Brontë uses Lockwood at all for the narrative since he "tells so much of the story in an imitation of Nelly's voice that he nearly disappears for pages on end" (29). Frangipane agrees with Spencer's assessment, provocatively arguing that Lockwood's "implausibly detailed memory" may indicate that he is relaying a "metanarrative" or a fictional narrative within a fictional narrative since much of the story that he communicates through his journal is "of events in which he did not participate," and many of these "details" come from "incredible feats of memory" (30). Speaking further about Lockwood's "mnemonic capacity," Frangipane maintains that the issue of memory within both Lockwood's and Nelly's narratives raise awkward questions that "cause the attentive reader to doubt the veracity of Lockwood's account and shake the mimetic foundations of the novel" (32). Goldfarb sums up the disjointed narration this way: "Nelly embellishes her memories […] and Lockwood embellishes his account of Nelly's monologue" (53).

Since Brontë hands over narrative control of *Wuthering Heights* to two unreliable chroniclers in Lockwood and Nelly, the Black body represented by Heathcliff remains suppressed in the text, not allowed to speak for itself due to its social displacement and

alienation, the power in the spoken word is diminished for Heathcliff as his otherness and racial difference move him outside of the white social structure that Wuthering Heights symbolizes. Therefore, Heathcliff cannot access the language familiar to the other characters, like Lockwood and Nelly, whose white privilege grants them linguistic exclusivity to the spoken word. Although he is a true outsider, Lockwood, as a white male writer, has ultimate control over the language and can easily integrate into the Wuthering Heights community. Spencer comments on Lockwood's effortless acceptance into Wuthering Heights and, subsequently, "His determination to enter the Heights results in the Heights entering him, through his use of language as much as his awakened curiosity" (84-85). However, the Heights never fully embraces Heathcliff. When locked out of its society, he attempts to gain linguistic control by taking advantage of his fluid identity, presumably "passing for white" and returning to the Heights as a "changed" man through his self-transformation. According to Graeme Tytler, "Heathcliff is much inclined to repeat his interlocutors' words, usually in order to domineer over them;" however, he is never able to fully gain control ("The Power" 59). Despite this, Heathcliff is still denied discourse, and two other characters hijack his story. Lockwood and Nelly have no interest by two in granting Heathcliff linguistic autonomy over his own history. Heathcliff's enigmatic raciality and mysterious history subvert the English establishment, making him a threat to both the social and familial orders. For these reasons, the text permanently silences him from telling his own story, negating any autonomy he may possess in relaying his history. The possible motives behind Lockwood, in his social position as an outsider, and Nelly, in her role as servant, to hijack Heathcliff's story could be their attempts to legitimize their tenuous positions in the Heights community hierarchy that Nelly herself admits does not "take to foreigners" and is condescending to her as "an elderly woman" who is "a servant merely" within the Yorkshire

class structure (Brontë 36 and 212). Both *Wuthering Heights* narrators use Heathcliff, a racial foreigner, as an object of discourse to gain the discursive power needed to enter a culture that considers strangers and women social outcasts as well.[41] Although Heathcliff is silenced and Lockwood and Nelly appropriate his story in the novel, Arnold completely upends Brontë's narrative structure as the filmmaker presents the film from Heathcliff's perspective, or as Murray observes:

> The director's take on Brontë's story is defined by a consistently ostentatious […] recasting of the narrative as seen and experienced from Heathcliff's perspective. The events of the movie's first sixty-five minutes are almost wholly witnessed from the physical and psychological point of view of that character as a traumatized, abandoned black slave child […] rescued from the streets of Liverpool by Cathy's father, Mr. Earnshaw ("*Wuthering Heights*" 57).

Interestingly, Andrea Arnold's film completely subverts Brontë's frame narrative, eliminating Lockwood and relegating Nelly to a minor role. One primary purpose appears to be that Arnold reorients the story's perspective to Heathcliff in an apparent attempt to re-position him within the text's narrative space so that the viewers can better comprehend Heathcliff's oppression and the violent culture he watches from the sidelines. Later in the chapter, I will examine further how Arnold uses various film techniques and camera angles to orient the film from Heathcliff's point of view as he watches, interacts, and silently observes the other characters. Arnold racializes Heathcliff to afford deference to Blackness, and in doing so, she creates a safe space for the Black body to express that Blackness primarily from Heathcliff's perspective.

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[41] Von Sneidern states, "Lockwood, the quasi-Anglo-Saxon representative of the outside world, contrasts sharply with this insular world. He is nouveau riche: well-heeled, but rootless, lacking property, purpose through industry, and an identity of his own" (9).

Embodying the Text in Novel to Film Adaptations

In her influential study on the novel-to-film debate previously grounded in issues of fidelity that have dominated modern film studies, Kamilla Elliott establishes a theoretical method, or what she terms "interart criticism," to analyze translating novel to film, particularly in Victorian novels, which she argues are the most "cinematic novels" due to their prolific adaptability to the film medium (126). Elliot states, "Canonical novels have been the most often filmed and the most regularly discussed form of literary film adaptation. Canonical works tend to be filmed more than once. Canonical Victorian novels have been filmed most frequently of all: many have been filmed or televised at least 20 times and several 100 times" (126). Due to the adaptability of canonical literature, Elliot delineates the dialogue between the source novel and the text and how they respond to each other. Elliot predicates her theories on the concepts of adaptation that examine the elements of content and form transference between the film and its originating textual source. According to Elliot, form separates from content, and the novel's characters, plots, themes, and rhetoric "distill to content apart from form and transfer into the form of film" (133). To advance her argument, Elliot establishes five guiding principles with which to consider how textual plotline, characters, and other novelistic elements are translated into the visual media specifically reimagined for modern audiences: "the psychic," "the ventriloquist," "the genetic," "the de(re)composing," and "incarnational" concepts of

adaptation.[42] While Elliot's concepts provide fundamental approaches to adaptation theory, the incarnational concept best applies to Andrea Arnold's 2011 film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* and the director's choice to cast a Black actor as Heathcliff to tell a story of abuse and violence, specifically from his perspective.

Concentrating her incarnational theory specifically on novel-to-film adaptation and how novel and film interact through the adaptational processes, Elliot employs religious terminology to rationalize the method involved in translating text to film, which she characterizes as "the word made flesh, wherein the word is only a partial expression of a total representation that requires incarnation for its fulfillment, it represents adaptation as incarnation" (161). Referencing Anthony Burgess, Elliott asserts, "Every best-selling novel has been turned into a film, the assumption being that the book itself whets an appetite for the true fulfilment – the verbal shadow turned into light the word made flesh" (161). In other words, when literature is adapted into film, a transcendent transformation occurs that signifies a conversion of read text to performed text. As such, this adaptive transformation that originates within the written word produces the word incarnate, or word in human form, as an embodiment of linguistic expression. According to Elliot, the word made flesh produces a solidification of the body, making the body corporeal, and this corporeality is what allows the body to speak where the word becomes flesh becomes word. The novel can then speak by substantiating the body's ability to move freely and

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[42] According to Elliot, the psychic concept of adaptation "understands what passes from book to film as the 'spirit' of the text," or in other words, when the adapter seeks "a balance between preserving the spirit of the original and creating a new form" that follows the same essence, or what Elliot calls the "soul" of the source text, and capturing this spirit is the primary goal of the adaptation (136). The "ventriloquist" concept of adaption is the next approach that Elliot outlines for interpreting text to film adaption, which "props up the dead novel, throwing its voice onto the silent corpse," thereby producing a film that enriches the novel with elements that were not originally presented in the text (144). In Elliott's de(re)composing concept, "novel and film decompose, merge, and form a new composition at 'underground' levels of reading. The adaptation is a composite of textual and filmic signs merging in audience consciousness together with other cultural narratives and often leads to confusion as to which is novel, and which is film" (*Rethinking* 157).

autonomously within a space created through the text. Therefore, as Elliot maintains, the embodied word generates a space for embodied discourse, allowing the incarnated body to express itself through its linguistic control. The word made flesh, Elliot argues, is "the visualization of these adaptations […] as empirical evidence" of the body's substantiality, realization, and fulfillment (152). Elliot makes one last point on the embodied text: in its role as the source or the original "spirit," does not represent a transcendental signified to which the film must attach appropriate signifiers. However, the text itself is also a "transcendental signifi*er*," [emphasis by author] functioning as the ultimate referent (162).

Because of the novel's frequent adaptation in modern film as a "cinematic novel," Elliot uses *Wuthering Heights*, precisely the Heathcliff/Catherine dichotomy that implies literal and figurative oneness of body, as "an ideal case study" to evaluate her incarnational concepts on adaptation (135). Elliott also suggests that "written words can have a spirit" or the essence of the source text that carries over to the adaptative form irrespective of a particular media output (136). Just as Elliot uses Brontë's source novel as an illustration of her adaptation models, I use Arnold's film adaptation of Brontë's text as an exemplar to apply Elliot's incarnational model since Arnold, as both director and writer, maintains the "spirit" of Brontë's book by fulfilling the written words through the character embodiment process. Arnold creates an additional layer to her embodiment of Brontë's character by portraying Heathcliff as black, and in doing so, the filmmaker first deconstructs the traditional character and then reconstructs him exclusively within the Black body, thereby moving Blackness to a prominent space within the film's plotline. An application of Elliot's incarnational concept implies that "the word made flesh" demonstrates Heathcliff's consistent abuse and marginalization by the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, a culture white imperialist culture represented by the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, a culture

built on racial violence. Arnold embodies Brontë's text by characterizing Heathcliff as a Black immigrant slave. The filmmaker fulfills the text's incarnation by utilizing vivid and stark visuals of Heathcliff's scarred and marked body, among other significations of his raciality, to invoke compassion from a modern audience that witnesses Heathcliff's abuse from his point of view as the film's "ultimate outsider." Arnold also uses coded visual language, an example of Elliot's "word becomes flesh becomes the word," to demonstrate black subjection within the white British patriarchy that consumes others and commodifies Blackness to the detriment of the Black body.

Filmic Adaptations of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

To thoroughly examine how Arnold's film reconstructs Heathcliff's racial identity, it is necessary to briefly review the frequent cinematic adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* and how these movies address, or do not address, Heathcliff's race and implied ethnicity. Although there have been cinema and television adaptations of Brontë's novel from various cultural, historical, and geographic perspectives, this study will examine three critically acclaimed *Wuthering Heights* films from American and British productions and how these adaptations portray the Heathcliff character, respectively.[43] Two of these adaptations, the Wyler and Kosminsky films, were big-screen productions. Producers developed The Giedroyc film for television as a two-part series.

American filmmaker William Wyler directed, via Samuel Goldwyn Productions, the most iconic and romanticized adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* in 1939, featuring Merle Oberon as Catherine Earnshaw Linton and Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff.[44] Speaking of the film's

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[43] See Appendix D.

[44] The screenplay is by writers Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht, with screenwriter, director, and actor John Huston contributing revisions.

influence on the *Wuthering Heights* cultural legacy, Hila Shachar suggests this version of the film produced during Hollywood's "Golden Era" is "the most well-known film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* […] and greatly influenced subsequent screen adaptations of [the novel], many of which draw primarily from Wyler's adaptation of the novel rather than from the novel itself" (14). Wyler directed the film in Hollywood at the end of the 1930s, a highly fraught socio-political period defined by systematic racial segregation. As Daniel Bernardi acknowledges, 1930s American films like Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* "share an uneasiness around certain categories of race and class and a seemingly willful ambiguity in the face of virulent racial discourses at home and abroad" (5). Bernardi further characterizes the treatment of race during this "Golden Era" of Hollywood cinema, maintaining that "whiteness reigned supreme" in the movie industry. The films produced during this time conveniently "stepped carefully around issues of race and ethnicity." As the 1930s moved forward, many Hollywood producers and directors "increasingly avoided ethnically explicit tales of assimilation" (7).

With this scholarship in mind, it is notable that Wyler's adaptation practically omits any reference to Heathcliff's raciality except for an occasional "gypsy" reference made by the other characters, particularly by Hindley, who uses the term to demonstrate the master/servant dichotomy he forces on Heathcliff in the film. Although it would appear that Wyler is acknowledging a definitive racial aspect of Heathcliff's characterization, "gypsy" seems to be a generic term that this project has previously discussed as a standard reference for any person of color that does not necessarily connote specific race or as Tom Winnifirth reminds us, "'gypsy' and 'Lascar' [are] both vague terms, [that are] derogatory rather than descriptive" (508). In Wyler's adaptation, there is little mention of Heathcliff's ethnicity or where he originates. The casting of white British actor Laurence Olivier disregards the implications that Heathcliff is

anything other than white. It also denies the evidence that he might have been enslaved before coming to Wuthering Heights.[45] Wyler avoids the underlying racial commentary at the heart of Brontë's novel. The filmmaker presents a melodramatic template eventually utilized by other adaptations that over-glamorizes the Catherine/Heathcliff relationship as a tragic love story, or as Shachar observes, Wyler's *Wuthering Heights*, "inaugurates the dominant screen tropes for later adaptations" that continue to appeal to film's modern viewers (35). Wyler eliminates any ideas of social, political, or cultural criticism in his film for a romantic plotline, highlighting the doomed love affair between Catherine and Heathcliff. Of course, due to the 1930s radically racist and restrictive segregation policies instituted in the motion picture industry, particularly in the United States, actors of color only played minor subservient roles in films if these actors were represented at all. Therefore, in the 1930s, Wyler did not explicitly depict a man of color in a starring role, much less highlight an interracial relationship in a mainstream Hollywood film. The prevailing racism and unstable social climate of the 1930s compelled Wyler to exclude any references to race and slavery in his film. For these reasons, Wyler presents a literal interpretation of Heathcliff's ethnicity, and the director depends on the generic interpretation of Heathcliff as a gypsy, which avoids including deep racial complexity in the character's cinematic persona.

Two other American-British film adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* are notable due to the critical praise of the Heathcliff casting in each adaptation. A big screen adaptation, billed as *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, was produced in 1992 by American film company Paramount Pictures. British filmmaker Peter Kosminsky directs this version, which features

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[45] Although Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* is an American production by Samuel Goldwyn, Wyler wanted British actors for the roles. Race was not a priority in the casting, but nationality proved vital for Wyler's vision for the film's characters (Herman 18).

French actress, Juliette Binoche as Catherine, and British actor Ralph Fiennes as Heathcliff.

Kosminsky's costume drama, clearly influenced by Wyler's 1939 adaptation, presents the

melodramatic, hyper-romanticized interpretation of Catherine and Heathcliff that Wyler's film

initiated over fifty years prior. According to Shachar, Kominsky's version "invests in the

imagery of the lovers' discourse to promote certain positions regarding masculinity in a post-

feminist world. The film is also part of the wider trend of heritage cinema of the 1980s and

1990s, which arose as a particular type of costume film and mode of engagement with narratives

of the past" (15). The decade between the 1980s and 1990s would presumably afford Kominsky

more creative leeway to present Heathcliff as more racially diverse than Wyler's 1930 version of

the character; however, Kominsky's interpretation of Heathcliff realized through actor Ralph

Fiennes, who at the time was considered a 1990s blue-eyed "sex symbol," centers more on the

white actor's brooding masculinity as a sexual signifier, rather than any racial signification of the

character implied in Brontë's novel ("Fiennes Dislikes Sex Symbol Image").[46] As Shachar

observes, "In Kosminsky's hands, and within Fiennes' body, Heathcliff becomes many different

men: a remnant of the Romantic literary persona, a suffering and wronged hero, a disturbing yet

glamorous sadist and a sexy heartthrob" (93).[47] In other words, Kominsky's interpretation of

Heathcliff is grounded more in masculinity rather than any other character trait, so while

Heathcliff embodies various masculine personas in Kominsky's film, the character never is

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[46] Ed Guerrero summarizes the "cultural moments" in the late 1980s on through the 1990s when mainstream Hollywood films began focusing on the Black experience and Black narratives: "Hollywood began to show signs of opening up to Black creativity and energy again. Gradually, all aspects of Black filmmaking and filmic representation began to gain momentum [...]" (24).

[47] Shachar also references a quote by one of the film's producers regarding the selection of Fiennes to play Heathcliff in the 1992 adaption, "Mary Selway, the producer of the film, has been quoted saying that the decision to cast Fiennes as Heathcliff was determined by the need for someone 'who would be a film star – who could take on the film and have the power to dominate it'" (94).

realized as a person of color, and any notions of a racialized Heathcliff is pushed aside and virtually ignored.

British Independent Television (ITV) produces another critically regarded adaptation in 2009 as a two-part television series on American Public Broadcasting Services (PBS). British filmmaker Coky Giedroyc directs this adaptation, starring two English actors, Charlotte Riley as Catherine, and Tom Hardy as Heathcliff. Shachar makes interesting observations about Giedroyc's characterization of Heathcliff as a "familiar mode of venerated masculine identity" and Tom Hardy, the white actor who plays Heathcliff, mimics "the well-known masculine persona of Emily Brontë's infamous 'romantic' hero" portrayed in the previous adaptations featuring Olivier and Fiennes (161). This romantic masculine conceptualization of Heathcliff coincides with past film adaptations that define Heathcliff as a sexual signifier rather than the racial signification strongly implied in Brontë's novel. Interestingly, and perhaps most notably, the Giedroyc/ITV film presents invented scenes from Heathcliff's childhood that Shachar says "are invented to allow the audience to understand his tenuous position in terms of class and racial ideologies in the nineteenth century" (162).[48] However, having a white actor play Heathcliff tempers any ideas of raciality that the filmmakers may be conveying to the viewers. To that end, Shachar clarifies,

> As is often the case throughout ITV's *Wuthering Heights*, such possibilities [to address racial or socio-political ideas] are never fully worked out as a coherently politicised interpretation of the novel. Rather, as soon as the film raises such debates, it effectively

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[48] The scene that Shachar references from the film is one early scene when Nelly is harshly bathing young Heathcliff; she refers to him as a "gypsy brat." Another invented scene finds the Earnshaw family in church, and the congregation, who are also community members, stare and make a spectacle of Heathcliff as the adopted outsider. A later scene shows the townspeople gossiping about Heathcliff being Earnshaw's illegitimate son. The priest then tells Earnshaw that "a bastard" like Heathcliff is not welcome in the church (Shachar 163).

closes them off. Heathcliff's character is not allowed to linger for long in such a critical

interpretative context but rather the adaptation moves on and shifts the focus to the wider,

more dominant mode of representation: the Romantic, tortured hero. (166)

Although the Giedroyc/ITV film expands Heathcliff's childhood to give him a backstory, the

filmmakers choose not to directly approach any elements of the character that may address race

in the nineteenth century, where the film's events are located. Therefore, the racial aspects

underlying Heathcliff's characterization are absent from the plot. Giedroyc portrays him as a

white tragic hero who is hyper-romanticized to benefit audiences more familiar with Wyler's

film than Brontë's novel.

Collectively, the *Wuthering Heights* film adaptations examined here demonstrate that

despite the novel's racially ambiguous descriptions of Heathcliff and the questions surrounding

his ethnic history, the most critically regarded cinematic adaptations from Britain and America

feature white actors as Heathcliff and his consistent whitewashing in earlier *Wuthering Heights*

films is the cinematic legacy that Andrea Arnold inherits from these past adaptations as she

attempts to mediate the character's portrayal with her definite racialization of Heathcliff. In this

context, Arnold makes a turn by reading Heathcliff distinctly and unambiguously as a person of

color. In casting a Black actor, Arnold adds another dimension to her film as she incarnates

Heathcliff with more profound racial complexity. In reconceptualizing Brontë's character in this

manner, Arnold moves past the romanticized stereotypes of Heathcliff as the white tragic hero

figure so often portrayed in previous film adaptations, and she thereby rewrites Heathcliff

through the Black body, affording him a perspective that embodies a voice to the racial discourse underlying Brontë's original text.[49]

Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights*, 2011

Some film critics lauded Arnold's controversial decision to cast an Afro-Caribbean actor as Heathcliff in her 2011 film adaptation *Wuthering Heights*, calling her choice "bold," "passionate," and "admirable" (Bradshaw et al.). While other critics, like Winnifrith, questioned Arnold's "odd" casting choice:

> Political correctness and postcolonial theory [...] may also have influenced Arnold in her
> odd decision to have black actors playing the parts of Heathcliff as a child and as an adult
> in the 2011 film of *Wuthering Heights*. There are several hints of Heathcliff's ethnicity,
> not all of them from reliable sources. At one stage he is described as being as black as his
> father, a reference to the Devil […] Now of course it is not ecclesiastically correct to
> refer to the Devil as a person, and certainly not politically correct to call him black.
> But this particular reference may be more about moral character than about skin color.
> (508)

However, Arnold's interpretation goes far beyond the logistics concerning how a Black Heathcliff would navigate the white spaces of eighteenth-century Yorkshire since with her film, she makes a noticeable turn in depicting racialization from Brontë's source text. As Hutcheon argues in her foundational study on adaptation and fidelity, the act of adaptation itself "becomes an act of appropriating and salvaging while trying to give new meaning to a text. Therefore, novelty gives adaptation its value" (8). By casting a Black actor in the role of Heathcliff,

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[49] Referencing Mikkail Bakhtin's dialogist concept, which defines the relation of any utterance to other utterances within time and space, Paula Massood posits that as a part of cinematic discourses, casting is a signifying strategy that "illuminates the text," or the embodiment of the text in space and time (5).

explicitly reimagined as an abandoned African slave, Arnold not only transforms the text into flesh, but she also reincarnates the word through him, thereby creating a new space of inclusion for Blackness, only hinting at in past adaptations.

Rather than avoiding the obvious socio-political issues of racial oppression and white supremacy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British culture like previous *Wuthering Heights* film adaptations, Arnold magnifies these social concerns in her film. She, therefore, commands viewers' attention to these subjects, which remain problematic in modern culture. In his critique of the movie, Peter Bradshaw asserts that Arnold's film and her overtly racialized portrayal of Heathcliff offers a ""shock of the new" that challenges the audience's previous knowledge of Brontë's text and characters, particularly that of Heathcliff (1). In her film, Arnold addresses what modern readers of Brontë's novel consistently ask: "Is Heathcliff Black, and if he is, what does that mean?" Bradshaw further notes that Arnold's film does not just arouse nostalgia for Brontë's novel; it creates a novelty of its own, almost a "kind of pre-literary reality effect" in that the film is not simply "another layer of interpretation superimposed on a classic's frills and all these other remembered versions," but Arnold's film attempts to "create something that might have existed before the book itself" (1). Writing on the inclusion of racial topics in modern adaptations, Hutcheon notes, "the time [twenty-first century] is clearly right, in the United States, as elsewhere, for adaptations of works on the timely topic of race" (143). Murray points out that as a filmmaker, Arnold "aims to adapt, rather than repeat, British social realist cinema's traditional practices and priorities" ("Red Roads from Realism" 17). Literature to film adaptations like Arnold's satisfy the audience's desire for visualizations that retain original text elements while adding creative future-forward aspects to the existing narrative. In other words, modern audiences want a "new spin" on the traditional to connect the adaptation to the original.

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Arnold makes creative choices in the film that cater to the modern audiences familiar with Brontë's novel but are open to revisions that add a new layer to the novel's original plotline and characterizations.

Besides the casting of a Black actor to play Heathcliff, another significant revision that Arnold makes is orienting the film's perspective primarily from Heathcliff's point of view, giving him power and autonomy over not only his own story but also the story of the other characters in the film, particularly that of Catherine. Murray summarizes how Arnold approaches Heathcliff's viewpoint in the movie:

> The film is defined by a consistently ostentatious (because ostentatiously consistent) recasting of Brontë's original narrative as seen and experienced through Heathcliff's eyes. The events of the first 65 minutes are witnessed almost entirely from the physical (and, by extension, psychological) vantage point of this traumatised pubescent boy; the narrative's second half then pivots around the perspective of the young adult Heathcliff, a man of means returned to Wuthering Heights only to find his carefree childhood love […] grown into a woman […] who is trapped within the suffocating confines of staid bourgeois matrimony. ("Red Roads from Realism" 7)

Arnold uses a POV camera angle to mimic Heathcliff's first-person perspective and replicate the character's line of sight. This effective technique permits the audience to see the events as Heathcliff sees them, requiring the viewers to take on an active rather than passive role in watching the film.[50] Arnold further emphasizes Heathcliff's perspective by focusing various extreme close-up shots of his eyes.

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[50] The primary filming locations are the villages of Thwaite (Wuthering Heights) and Coverham (Thrushcross Grange).

In the novel, Heathcliff replaces Hindley as the master of Wuthering Heights and displaces the rest of the Earnshaws. In doing so, Heathcliff occupies the colonizer's space and relocates himself as the master of the manor house. In Brontë's version, Heathcliff is seen through the colonizer's/enslaver's/oppressor's gaze, or as Meyer affirms, "Heathcliff is subjected to the potent gaze of the racial arrogance deriving from British imperialism" (97). In other words, Heathcliff is defined by a social system that considers people of color as social inferiors. Essaka Joshua refers to this biased perception as the "Gothic gaze," or a "prejudicial look" that constructs monstrosity from otherness, thereby "challenging more rational forms of evidence" that would speak against the Other as monstrous based purely on appearance (50).[51] However, Arnold subverts the gaze from an imperialistic vantage to Heathcliff's perspective, allowing the viewer to see the narrative primarily from Heathcliff's point of view. Arnold eliminates Lockwood's and Nelly's frame narratives entirely. Instead, she allows the film's viewers to witness the events filtered through Heathcliff's gaze, or as Murray notes, Arnold presents "a chain of pregnant, largely wordless vignettes in which an imperfectly maturing human being watches, wonders, and wants in relation to his wider world" ("Red Roads from Realism" 8-9). Arnold pushes back against Brontë's text and its virtual silencing of Heathcliff, and it is from this voyeuristic framework, the audience consistently "sees" Heathcliff "seeing" as he watches the events in the Heights and the Grange unfold. The film is replete with voyeuristic gazing by Heathcliff, and there are scenes with little to no dialogue that find him just standing observing the other characters, persistently spying on them as they interact with one another, at times ignoring his presence altogether. Brian Goss notices the commonality of voyeurism in Arnold's cinematic oeuvre, specifically in her adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, when he points out,

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[51] Joshua coins this term based on society's biased view of Frankenstein's Creature due to his perceived physical disabilities (50-51).

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"Arnold's male protagonist, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, is also an unidealized voyeur, engaging in surveillance through cracks and holes in the walls of the Earnshaw home as well as through the windows of the Linton's estate" (6). This voyeuristic quality that Arnold weaves into the film's structure serves as a commentary on how Heathcliff is the ultimate outsider detached from the white society that he can only distantly watch and never actually participate in due to his race and unacceptable social status.

The idea of voyeurism as a metaphor for social ostracization that Arnold features with Heathcliff's interactions, or lack thereof, with the other characters harkens back to Shelley's Creature, who himself incessantly spies on an "adopted" family that he hopes will provide him the connection to society he longs for as an impetus to inclusion. In Heathcliff's case, and to a certain extent with the Creature as well, the act of voyeurism has strong sexual connotations that imply both rejection and desire associated with an act that one is a part of but not included. Arnold taps into this trope apparent in both *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* as she establishes her scenes from a voyeuristic standpoint in which the audience watches the movie characters derive an almost sadomasochistic enjoyment from witnessing the pain or distress that the other characters experience. As such, the act of looking is often associated with violent desire filtered through Heathcliff's perspective. Arnold depicts scenes of violence, or the physical or mental trauma of past violence, that the characters appear to feed upon. Even sexual scenes are brutal and sadistic. One such provocative scene finds Heathcliff silently watching Hindley and his wife engaging in an aggressive, almost sadistic, sex act openly in a field near the Heights. This scene exemplifies the cycle of violence and desire that Arnold allows the audience to observe through Heathcliff's point of view, symbolizing the violent nature of the imperialist environment that surrounds him. Although at times their abuse appears mutual, Cathy also

participates in abusing Heathcliff, and in two notable scenes, one during their childhood and the other when they are adults, Cathy violently rips out Heathcliff's hair during what is at first meant to be an intimate embrace. Heathcliff later exhibits similar sadomasochistic actions when he painfully bites Isabella's lip during their first kiss at Thrushcross Grange, a kiss that he sees Cathy watching from a nearby window. Throughout the film, Arnold portrays both the sexualized and racialized violence that makes up this brutal social order in scenes that link Heathcliff's voyeuristic presence to these acts of violence that the film's audience is forced to witness through his perspective, thereby influencing the audience to empathize with his pain as an othered presence in an otherwise violent order. However, the audience takes on the role of voyeur as well, as the film's viewers visually devour the embodiment of Heathcliff's abuse and trauma. Murray contends that Arnold's "point-of-view visuals allows her movies to cultivate an exceptionally calibrated form of intimacy between diegetic character and extra-diegetic spectator" ("Red Roads from Realism" 18). Heathcliff, as the Black outsider with questionable origins, caught in the center, learns over the years how to perpetrate violence upon those who constantly enacted violence upon him throughout his childhood, while the viewing audience watches.

Heathcliff is a product of his environment, retaliating against an imperialistic society founded on violence and racism. Subsequently, he presents a decidedly dual nature: on the one hand, his hatred for his oppressors motivates him; on the other, he wrestles with a conflicted desire for Catherine. Debra Goodlett characterizes Heathcliff's feelings for Catherine as a "sexual addiction" based on the "need to possess another being" (316-317), while Daniela Garofolo equates Heathcliff's love to a capitalistic consumptive desire rooted in "revenge rather than any emotional investment" (822-823). Arnold makes the audience of both the novel and

film question if Heathcliff's apparent love for Catherine is authentic or if their abusive "romance" is simply a byproduct of his quest for revenge against a sadistic racist society that repeatedly abuses him. Appropriately, the first scene depicted in the film marries the idea of violence and desire at the center of Heathcliff's and Catherine's relationship as Heathcliff violently and repeatedly hurls himself against a wall with Catherine's initials, "C.E." for Catherine Earnshaw and "Catherine Heathcliff," carved on it, visibly wounding himself as a violent reaction to Catherine's death. Those viewers familiar with Brontë's novel will immediately recognize this intense first scene influenced by the book's description of Lockwood discovering Catherine's various names ("Catherine Earnshaw," "Catherine Heathcliff," and "Catherine Linton") carved above the windowsill when he sleeps in her room at Wuthering Heights. Although Heathcliff's violent actions in this opening scene are self-inflicted, the sadomasochistic self-harm he exhibits here immediately orients the audience to the violent behavior that the rest of the film builds upon.

The audience can observe in both the novel and film how Heathcliff's humanity is gradually stripped away, revealing abusive and tyrannical behavior caused by the repeated cruelty he endures at the hands of virtually every member of the Yorkshire community, itself representing British imperial culture, or as Murray pointedly indicates, Heathcliff's treatment by this society is "an individual character study of child abuse's destructive consequences, whether perpetrated on a societal or familial level" ("Red Roads from Realism" 8). Although Heathcliff's behavior mirrors the violent and racist society that raised him, it is also this same society that regards his behavior as abhorrent. Through Heathcliff's perspective, shaped by racial oppression, social alienation, and repeated physical abuse, the imperial gaze reflects itself, revealing the effects of systematic racism inherent within a British empire supported by the enslavement of

people of color. Therefore, the reverse imperial gaze is a result of what Stephen Arata calls "cultural guilt," or the act of "British culture see(ing) its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms" (623). To that end, Heathcliff's dehumanization as monstrous or inhuman by the white community further pushes him away from its collective order. This discussion has already established that Heathcliff's disruption of the social order signifies his monstrosity to those within the order. In a social structure dominated by whiteness, society reduces Blackness to monstrosity when the white majority marks people of color as monsters. As monstrosity represents everything to be feared, and at the same time, what is secretly desired, the Black body is frequently identified as a location of monstrous horror, or as Dawn Keetley affirms, "monsters most often emerge from those impulses and people who are 'Othered' by society;" however, these same monsters can be transformative and be "embraced as a means of becoming something new" (188).

With her film adaptation, Arnold taps into the idea of remediating the monstrous other by telling the story from Heathcliff's perspective. At the same time, the audience observes the abuse he suffers from his vantage, providing a better sense of Heathcliff's psychological development in the wake of extreme brutality. Heathcliff's transformation reflects an unforgiving society that implements various tools of cultural violence, oppression, and exclusion to dehumanize the other, making monstrosity possible in othered figures like Heathcliff. The pathos demonstrated in Heathcliff's exclusion from society portrayed in the novel causes the audience to empathize with him as they ignore his sadistic personality to idealize his abusive relationship with Catherine as a grand love affair modern audiences have romanticized. Joyce Carol Oats characterizes the Heathcliff/Catherine coupling:

The highly passionate relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, forged in their embittered and savage childhood, has been variously interpreted: it is a doomed gothic romance […] it is curiously chaste, for all its emotional outpourings and, finally, as "innocent" as any love between sister and brother; then again, it is rude, lurid, unwholesome, intensely erotic and suggestive of an incestuous bond […]. (439)

Arnold makes clear that Heathcliff's cruelty emerges from the suffering he experiences due to an abusive childhood and an unhealthy social environment that actively cultivates monstrosity and makes monsters through the physical and emotional trauma associated with marginalization. However, despite his brutal treatment of those around him, the female characters still view Heathcliff as a highly sexualized figure, as he stimulates feelings of both aversion and desire. While Brontë is more subtle in expressing Heathcliff's sexuality in the novel due to the taboos of her time, Arnold fully embraces the monstrous desire that he arouses, making his suffering all the more desirable as the director conveys a sadomasochistic tone to the viewers, particularly with the interactions between him and Catherine.

Throughout the film, Arnold frequently centers the Heathcliff/Catherine dynamic squarely around the craving and consumption of physical suffering. No other scene illustrates this more than young Cathy licking Heathcliff's wounded back after Joseph cruelly whips him for not working. This close visual shot of Cathy erotically licking Heathcliff's scars while he silently weeps from physical pain is a remarkable and disorienting image to the viewer. Cathy's action, accompanied by her forceful command to him, "Let me see your back," appears to manifest an almost cannibalistic longing that assuages an urgent craving for his noticeable anguish caused by fresh wounding. Catherine licking Heathcliff's new wounds, which overlap with previous scarring on his body, strongly implying previous slave abuse, represents a desire

for the suffering, abuse, and the monstrosity born from that suffering. The visualization of this wounding/scarring also reorients the audience to the voyeuristic tone that Arnold consistently adopts throughout the film, making Heathcliff desirable to Catherine and to the audience because his suffering is so exposed. Therefore, Catherine figuratively consumes Heathcliff's pain, just as Heathcliff, as voyeur, visually consumes the other characters, and the audience consumes the film's embodiment of the original text.

Interestingly, Heathcliff's scarred back takes on an even more profound significance since the wounds on a Black body are more apparent to a modern audience sensitive to the horrors of eighteenth-century slave abuse. Adding another layer of narrative perspective to Heathcliff's character, Arnold allows his scars to speak, loudly calling attention to the white violence associated with imperialism and its lasting effects on the physically traumatized Black body. The damage to Heathcliff's body is more noticeable when emphasized through Arnold's strategic camera positioning that forces the audience to see the embodied physical trauma caused by Black enslavement under a white imperialist regime. An interesting consideration here is that Catherine, as a white woman, is part of that same imperialistic order, and her consummation of Heathcliff's pain reflects her membership in this violent culture that feeds off suffering. Circling back and applying Elliot's incarnational concept, "the word made flesh" demonstrates Heathcliff's repeated suffering and exclusion at the hands of a white imperialist culture built on racial violence and whose primary targets are those othered from its society.

In Brontë's novel, Heathcliff's othering characterizes him as a transcendent personality who invokes fear and awe in those around him. For this reason, he is the embodiment of an untamed and wild nature, since in the text, Brontë herself, through Catherine as told by Nelly, describes Heathcliff as "an unreclaimed creature without refinement, without cultivation; an arid

wilderness of furze and whinstone…a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" (80). In this context,

Heathcliff represents the transcendent, wild, and feral nature that society cannot control. This is

the truly awe-inspiring aspect of naturality, that which is sublime or as Edmund Burke famously

explains, someone or something that conveys "delightful horror" (52) and "tranquility tinged

with terror" (130) is the "truest test of the sublime" (52). Kant describes the "terrifying sublime,"

an object that both attracts and repeals (162). The sublime is born of the uncanny, and Heathcliff

represents both the sublime and uncanny within a natural world that cannot correctly identify

him. The fear and awe in which the other characters regard Heathcliff demonstrates his uncanny

existence within the white patriarchy that cannot properly categorize him and is fearful of his

intrusion on their white society. Hannon makes a comprehensive assessment of Heathcliff's

transcendence as a character that conveys the sublime:

> The transcendent nature of Heathcliff can be connected to the sublime effect, that which
>
> is seen as without boundaries and beyond the imaginable [..]. Therefore, a re-imagining
>
> of the character of Heathcliff will look into how he shares a common purpose with the
>
> sublime in his transgression of cultural limits. Heathcliff exploits a number of
>
> contemporary insecurities, among which is the fear of being outside the ordinary.
>
> Heathcliff therefore embodies the threatening sublime by stretching Victorian thinking
>
> and testing prevailing representative classifications. Heathcliff becomes a catalyst for the
>
> personal suffering of other characters in the narrative, inducing both a sombre and
>
> sublime experience [...] (234-235)

Heathcliff, "as an arid wilderness," embodies nature as the supernatural, and his ferocity

transgresses the cultural limits he tends to exploit primarily due to his fluid identity. Clarifying

how nature underlies Brontë's text, Margaret Homans comments that "*Wuthering Heights* is

informed by the presence of nature: metaphors drawn from nature provide much of the book's

descriptive language […] and the reader leaves the book with the sensation of having

experienced a realistic portrayal of the Yorkshire landscape" (9).[52] Analyzing Heathcliff through

the dark and murky landscape that surrounds him conjures up notions associated with the

"terrifying sublime," as he symbolizes nature's destructive power to incite strong emotion and

feelings of awe and nature manifested as a powerful and uncontrollable force. This aspect of the

natural landscape is most associated with sublimity since it is nature's tendency to extend beyond

human comprehension. Nature's full power is a force of terror, but that intense capacity also can

excite the observer. This conflict results in a sense of disorientation and human vulnerability.

The wild nature that seems to define Heathcliff invokes the myth of the primitive savage or the

European notion that people of color are inherently violent, wild, and to an extent, possess

decidedly evil natures. According to Joe Feagin:

> Europeans distinguished themselves from the "savages," and colonized peoples were
>
> demonized as replete with vices Europeans feared in themselves: wildness, brutishness,
>
> cruelty, laziness, and heathenism […] By the 1700s and 1800s well-developed theories of
>
> the cultural and racial inferiority of the 'uncivilized savages' were common in both
>
> England and the new United States. (368)

Of course, the myth of the savage is firmly rooted in white supremacy and racism, and the

relationship often depicted between the savage and nature serves as a racist reminder that the

savage is coarse, brutal, violent, and therefore fundamentally inferior to Europeans. Film

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[52] Homans makes an interesting observation concerning how Brontë portrays nature in the novel, pointing
out that "There are […] very few scenes in the novel that are actually set out-of-doors. With a few exceptions, the
crucial events take place in one or the other of the two houses. Cathy and Heathcliff, the characters whose relations
to nature would seem to be the strongest and the most important to the novel, are never presented on the moors,
together or apart, in either of the two major narratives" (9).

adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* often incorporate the savage trope that Brontë hints at in the

novel, and Heathcliff's "wild and savage nature" is frequently played dramatically by most

directors and their actors.[53]

Figure 7. *Wuthering Heights*. Theatrical poster. Dir. William Wyler, Samuel Goldwyn Prod. 1938.

Wikimedia Commons,

https://wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/Wuthering_Heights_%281939_poster%29.jpg. See

Appendix K for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

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[53] The theatrical poster for the U.S. release of William Wyler's 1939 version of *Wuthering Heights* shows a docile Catherine (Merle Oberon) looking off into the foreground, one hand placed demurely to her face while a wild-eyed and crazed Heathcliff (Laurence Olivier) stares menacingly at her from the dark shadows (see Figure 7).

However, Catherine's wild nature, which Brontë alludes to in the novel, is often downplayed or minimized in most film adaptations.[54] Shachar says that in Kominsky's adaptation, which is heavily influenced by previous films, Heathcliff "has usurped nature by taking control of it and Catherine's life" by dictating the female sex; however, in contrast Arnold's film, presumably due to the influence of contemporary racial and gender politics, redefines and subverts the natural landscape, making nature a more feminine ideal. Catherine's solidarity with nature's wildness controls Heathcliff rather than his domination of her. Arnold makes clear that although other films have traditionally portrayed Heathcliff as the dominant member in the Heathcliff/Catherine dynamic, it is Catherine as a member of the white middle class who frequently has the upper hand over Heathcliff. Therefore, Arnold often depicts Catherine as the instigator in her interactions with Heathcliff, and it is Cathy, not Heathcliff, who controls their relationship with her wild and violent behavior that metaphorically mimics the dark landscape where Arnold locates the characters. Murray asserts in his assessment of Arnold's films, "Arnold's interest in exterior topography stems from her apparent conviction that people are profoundly shaped by the places they inhabit. Depicting places constitutes an effective way of delving deep into the hidden complexities of people" ("Red Roads from Realism" 3). Arnold admits that the landscape and the space in which she situates her characters is a major influence on her characterization and that "the characters were defined by nature and by this very wild, rugged landscape where they live" (Brooks). Speaking on Heathcliff's and Catherine's relationship within the natural, Sim maintains, "As symbolic embodiments of nature, Heathcliff

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[54] Catherine's wildness, as it relates to her untamed disposition and savagery, is at the heart of Brontë's novel, and there are several references to Catherine's wild nature. Nelly describes Catherine as a "wild, wick slip" (34) and a "wild, hatless little savage" (41). Frances also refers to Catherine as "wild" (42), and Catherine calls herself "half savage" later in the novel (98). In their influential feminist reading of *Wuthering Heights*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe that Catherine, at her core, is essentially a "heedless wild child" whose inner conflict vacillates between denying her feral nature, symbolized by her relationship with Heathcliff or embracing her civilized side, which her marriage to Linton represents (299).

and Catherine function as the voices of nature, articulating its primary importance to their personal survival whilst contesting the devaluation of such landscapes in popular aesthetic discourse […]" 46). Although Arnold submerges Catherine and Heathcliff in nature when they habitually escape to the moors throughout the film's events, the director subverts the couple's relationship within the natural topography, and Catherine, rather than Heathcliff, is more aligned with the natural landscape as she influences his relationship with the natural world. To this end, several images in the film depict Catherine's brutal treatment of Heathcliff, corresponding with the bleak and uncultivated landscape surrounding the couple. Catherine is symbolically civilized by her marriage to Linton and her residence at Thrushcross Grange; however, her cultured persona sometimes fails, and she then reverts to nature, where her wild and violent behavior embodies her relationship with Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights.

Arnold pushes back on the wild, untamed savage trope commonly associated with Heathcliff in past cinematic adaptions of *Wuthering Heights*, and instead, the director emphasizes Catherine's savagery, which at times demonstrates the girl's uncontrollable temperament that is comparable to, or even worse than, Heathcliff's persona. In Arnold's film, Catherine shapes Heathcliff and influences the environment that encompasses them both, while Heathcliff is quiet and passive, playing the role of observer acted upon by Catherine. Several scenes convey Catherine's mastery of Heathcliff through her oneness with the natural environment. In one early scene during their childhood, Catherine invites Heathcliff for their first horseback ride out into the foggy moors. They ride together on one horse, Heathcliff sitting behind Catherine as she guides them across the bleak and unforgiving Yorkshire landscape. As the wind blisters around the children on horseback, Arnold provides close-up shots of Catherine's hair enticingly wafting in Heathcliff's face. Quite provocatively, in a brief image, the

girl's long dark locks transform into the horse's similarly long mane. Arnold shows these unified

images momentarily from Heathcliff's point of view as she moves in for an extreme close-up

that renders Cathy's hair, just for a second, indistinguishable from that of the animal they are

riding. In fact, as a recurring visual motif, there are many images throughout the film where

Catherine's hair wildly blows in the wind, signifying her symbiotic relationship with the

turbulent landscape (see Figures 8 and 9).[55] As Catherine navigates the horse with Heathcliff,

wandering silently off into the howling wind that continues to assail around them, Arnold signals

the connection both characters, particularly Catherine, have with the natural surroundings they

are compelled to move through together.

Figure 8. *Wuthering Heights*. Solomon Glave and Shannon Beer, scene still. Dir. Andrea Arnold, Hanway

Films. 2011. *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/nov/13/wuthering-heights-andrea-

arnold-review. See Appendix L for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

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[55] The still shot commonly used by film critics to illustrate their reviews of Arnold's film is young
Heathcliff and Catherine standing on the moors. Catherine's hair is visibly blowing in the wind as she turns towards
the camera (see Figure 8). Additionally, in the primary theatrical U.S. poster for the film shows a close-up shot of
Catherine again with her hair blowing about her face and neck. Here, Catherine is also prominently featured in the
foreground, looking straight on at the audience. Meanwhile, Heathcliff is much farther off in the background,
walking out of view and not facing the camera. The tagline: "Love is a force of nature" (see Figure 9).
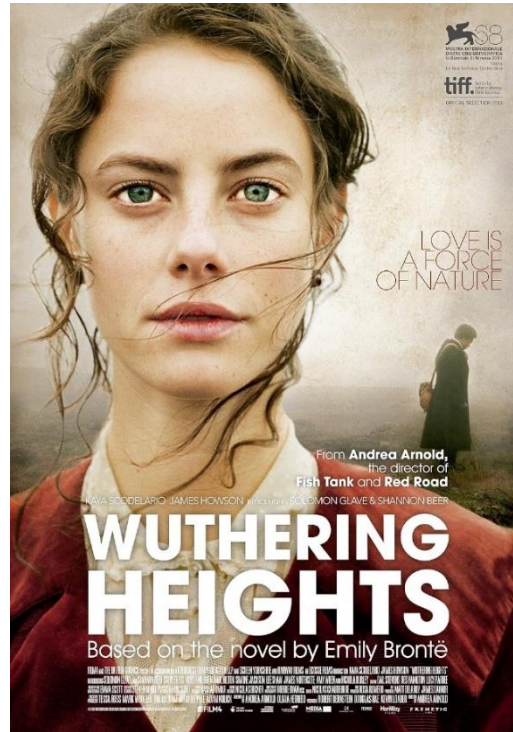
Figure 9. *Wuthering Heights*. U.S. Theatrical Poster. Dir. Andrea Arnold, Hanway Films. 2011. Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuthering_Heights_(2011_film)#/media/File:WutheringHeights2011_poster.jpg. See Appendix M for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

The early horse-riding scene mimics another scene when adult Heathcliff returns to the Heights after his three-year absence and takes another ride, this time with Catherine and Isabella, all characters riding separate horses. Once again, Catherine's hair is violently blowing in the wind, even more forcefully this time, as she leads Heathcliff and Isabella into the moors to confront Heathcliff for leaving her. Most notable here is the utterly tempestuous manner in which Catherine's hair is wildly blowing around her face, in almost Medusa-like tendrils, as she violently pushes Heathcliff to the ground and presses her foot on his head after asking him: "How could you have left me?" (1:23:58). Instead of fighting back, Heathcliff submits to her

hostility, utterly under Cathy's control, while she takes obvious pleasure in seeing him entirely submissive to her. Throughout the film, Catherine lusts for Heathcliff's suffering, and once she consumes his pain, she craves more, joining the rest of society in molding his brutality; he learns how to enact painful revenge from her and the violent environment that has fostered him. Catherine even feeds upon herself, licking her own wounds after Isabella accidentally scratches her arm later in the film. Catherine's actions mimic the earlier scene when she licks Heathcliff's scarred back. Arnold provides a close-up shot of Catherine licking her wounds while Heathcliff stares longingly while she figuratively cannibalizes herself. Although Heathcliff is commonly read as a metaphorical vampire in the novel, in Arnold's film, Catherine acts vampiric when her cultivated façade disappears. She feeds her monstrous appetite, even with her own suffering.

A strong example of the power play between Heathcliff and Catherine is the highly evocative "mud scene" during their childhood. In this invented scene, not in the novel, young Catherine accidentally falls in a giant mud puddle when she and Heathcliff are walking on the moors. Because Heathcliff laughs at her, Catherine begins to throw mud at him; he then playfully retaliates by holding her arms down with his knees and smearing mud on her face, almost simulating his own darker skin, as Cathy giggles and laughs in the mud. As Heathcliff holds her down, Catherine stares up at him with an expressionless, still dominating look. For optimum effect, Arnold zooms the camera in on Catherine's face in an extreme close-up shot. Even though Heathcliff has Catherine pinned and he takes on a dominant position, the audience gets the impression Catherine is dictating this intimacy, which is uncannily childish/pure and adult/tainted all at the same time. Catherine's transfixed stare at Heathcliff while he pins her down, she invites him to continue his restraint. At the same time, she enjoys the pain he might be inflicting, her look reminiscent of the potent white gaze that signifies the control she exerts over

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him. Instead of panning away from the children, Arnold presents two more close-up shots in this scene, one of the gritty mud the children submerge themselves in, and another of a sharp-looking brush nearby to represent Catherine and Heathcliff's harsh and unforgiving relationship reflected in a harsh and unforgiving environment. With this scene, Arnold embodies Brontë's landscape, and the muddy environs in which the children are submerged convey an inverted Garden of Eden where Heathcliff and Catherine, as allegorical Adam and Eve, play out a distorted version of the fall of man, illustrating the myth of idyllic love.

In this murky landscape, Heathcliff and Catherine both mimic violent desire in oneness with a wild and unyielding environment that mirrors their relationship; however, Catherine laying in the mud, becoming a part of the landscape, appears to be even more one with the natural environment than Heathcliff, a more passive character in Arnold's interpretation of their misguided love affair. The long-established characterization of Heathcliff as the incarnation of masculine sexuality presumes his aggressiveness towards Catherine, but it is Catherine who initiates the violence in Arnold's film. Heathcliff learns from the environment and landscape and also from Catherine, a member of this violent culture. These scenes pointedly demonstrate that Heathcliff is not necessarily feeding upon Catherine. However, they feed on each other, gaining strength from nature, or as Shachar maintains their love is "akin to nature itself, transcending society" (10).

While Arnold depicts instances of Catherine's sadism directed against Heathcliff to exploit his suffering, it is Hindley who represents the primary source of Heathcliff's abuse in both the novel and film. Hindley, more than any other character, personifies the racially oppressive British culture that viciously consumes social outcasts like Heathcliff. Brontë encodes a clear slave/master dynamic in the novel with Hindley's attempts to relegate Heathcliff to a

position of forced servitude and Heathcliff's subsequent resistance to this role through eventual calls for revenge against Hindley and the social forces that drive this mistreatment. Hindley's exploitative abuse against Heathcliff symbolizes Hindley's efforts to prevent Heathcliff from any social mobility or entrance into this society at all. Building upon the novel's implications of a master/slave dichotomy between Hindley and Heathcliff, Arnold's film, with its limited dialogue, extends this notion by presenting coded visual language meant to signify Heathcliff's literal and symbolic enslavement within this oppressive culture built on slave labor and colonialism that would be familiar to the film's modern viewers. Noting Arnold's efficacy with imagery, Goss maintains, "Among Arnold's films, *Wuthering Heights* goes furthest in dissolving narrative into evocative images" (5), and writing on the same subject, Murray observes the "visceral quality" of the images presented in the film ("Red Roads from Realism" 9). Heathcliff's racialization only reinforces these potent visuals that Arnold compels the audience to see and associate with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slavery, particularly Heathcliff's scourged back, already examined in this discussion, a scarring that implies his suffering from slave abuse. Also, just as provocative are the branded initials on Heathcliff's shoulder, a signification that he once was indeed an enslaver's "property," thereby removing any doubt for the audience that Heathcliff may have been a victim of eighteenth-century slavery. These graphic images, or "visual spectacles," as Murray refers to them, shot in tight POV camera angles, elicit a sympathetic response from the audience watching the events through Heathcliff's eyes ("Red Roads from Realism" 17).

Arnold does not only use vivid imagery to symbolize enslavement and subjugation through Heathcliff's wounded Black body (Elliot's "word becomes flesh"), but the director also utilizes language ("word becomes flesh becomes word") that invokes black oppression as well.

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Although Arnold presents an almost silent film where speaking is extremely economized, the discourse directed at Heathcliff still communicates racial violence and abuse, and there are several scenes where Hindley uses racist language against Heathcliff, repeatedly referring to him as a "nigger," most notably in a scene where Hindley pointedly refers to Heathcliff by the racial epithet rather than call him "brother." Hindley's refusal to consider Heathcliff a part of the Earnshaw family is an essential element of Brontë's novel that Arnold picks up on; however, the film adds an additional layer with Hindley's use of brutally prejudiced language meant to insult and disparage Heathcliff's Blackness, further galvanizing in the modern viewer's mind an association with Heathcliff and the dehumanizing institution of slavery. Here, Arnold exploits the language and allows Hindley's racist verbalizations to speak through Heathcliff's Black body, thereby emphasizing Heathcliff's role as the black subaltern trapped in a system of racialized enslavement that incessantly feeds upon his suffering and degradation.

Arnold's apparent agenda is not only to remove all ambiguity as to Heathcliff's racial background, but she seems committed to allowing Heathcliff's perspective to take control, thereby permitting the audience to *see* Brontë's character suffer as a victim of British imperialism and the dehumanizing institution of slavery. Arnold considers the politics of interpreting Heathcliff as black, and she uses visual imagery and language that speaks to the trauma that the Black body has experienced in a white-dominated socially conscious culture that excludes racial otherness for the sake of white privilege. With her film, Arnold explicitly depicts the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British racism underlying Brontë's novel; however, the filmmaker also critiques current racial issues, those still related to the oppression of people of color in present-day society. Murray maintains that through her growing body of work, Arnold consistently "acknowledges the long-term historical persistence of racist and colonialist

discourses and practices within British society" ("Red Roads from Realism" 8). Arnold's adaption of *Wuthering Heights*, which re-orients the narrative of Brontë's novel from a white viewpoint to a racialized perspective, follows the current trend in modern media of reimaging classic literature, mainly Victorian fiction, in terms of Blackness.

Interventions

Canonical Victorian novels have been most frequently adapted into films, and this "literary cinema" robustly continues to translate classical texts into modern adaptations that address past and present social, political, and cultural issues (Elliot 125). Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is one of those nineteenth-century novels that has inspired countless adaptations that attempt to bring to life Brontë's multifaceted plotline and incarnate her most complex characters. It is this incarnation, that according to Kamilla Elliot, is the "total fulfilment of the textual word," which satisfies the audience's longing for "the verbal shadow turned into light, the word made flesh" (161). Elliot implies that the words on the page are not truly "alive" until they are incarnated through film and embodied by actors. Andrea Arnold taps into this adaptive process by building upon an existing *Wuthering Heights* film tradition, particularly the influential 1939 William Wyler/MGM production. However, Arnold moves away from Brontë's source novel and even further away from prior film adaptations by definitively racializing Heathcliff. By presenting the film from Heathcliff's perspective, as an othered Black boy and man navigating the often-racist late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European landscape, Arnold gives a distinctive voice to Brontë's character, allowing the audience to visualize the story from Heathcliff's point of view. Arnold adds another dimension to Brontë's characterization since the filmmaker embodies Blackness through Heathcliff, while Brontë's words can only hint at the character's racial background. The freedom that Arnold enjoys as a

modern filmmaker to explore raciality in Brontë's novel demonstrates how adaptations consistently build upon source materials as they connect to the past while simultaneously creating new textual afterlives that continue to move the classic novel across time into modernity.

CHAPTER THREE:

WHITE DICKENS, BLACK ACTORS: COLOR-BLIND CASTING IN

THE BBC'S *OLIVER TWIST* (2007) AND FX'S *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* (2023)

In her 2011 adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, director Andrea Arnold makes a crucial decision in casting an actor of color to play the role of Heathcliff—a character who is clearly ethnic in the original novel but not specifically designated as Black by Emily Brontë. Arnold's casting choice is a crucial element that illustrates the socio-political commentary about race and belonging that she undertakes with her film. For this reason, Arnold does not ignore Heathcliff's raciality, but highlights his ethnicity as she tells Heathcliff's story from his perspective. With this in mind, it is notable that many modern film adaptations choose a color-blind or racially diverse cast in filmic re-imaginings of Victorian literature: this is something that Rachel Carroll refers to as "specific representational strategies" (17). However, the Blackness that the filmmakers initiate is never realized because although the audience sees a Black actor performing, curiously none of the characters are often two-dimensional caricatures exhibiting no interior development.[56]

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[56] There are several terms that refer to "color-blind" casting, including "multicultural," "nontraditional," "interracial," "integrated," "race conscious, and "race free." According to Thompson, these terms "are often used interchangeably […]" (81). In defining color-blind for theater and film, Jami Rogers acknowledges the fluidity of the term, arguing that "The terminology of the practice under investigation here [color-blind casting] is notoriously difficult and has become more so as the choice of language used to describe it has grown" (407). Ayanna Thompson breaks down the various color-blind categories under the blanket term "nontraditional casting(s)" and designates the categories as: "color-blind" (the meritocratic practice of casting actors of color in playing traditionally white roles); "societal" (actors of color playing "roles originally conceived as being white if people of color perform these roles in society as a whole"); "conceptual" (casting roles meant to "enhance the play's social resonance"); and "cross-cultural casting" (which sets the events in "a different culture and location") (76). In this project, I will use the term "color-blind" casting to discuss the concept of casting actors of color in roles traditionally considered white without any specific references to race; and "color conscious" for the act of using actors of color in a traditionally white roles to make a political statement or enact social commentary on racism, discrimination, or other societal issues centered on raciality.

According to Ayanna Thompson, this is just as racially problematic as not having a Black

character in the film at all (78-79), and Monique Pittman argues that this relegates these Black

characters in many ways to a magical negro "black savior" stereotype (189). other characters in

the film acknowledge that the character is Black. As a result, these Black

In this chapter, I will analyze the practice of color-blind casting in two modern

adaptations of Charles Dickens's novels, *Oliver Twist* (2007) and *Great Expectations* (2023). I

will explore the Black and racially integrated casting of Charles Dickens's characters,

particularly Nancy, portrayed by Black British actress Sophie Okonedo in the acclaimed BBC

television adaptation of *Oliver Twist* (2007); and Estella, played by African-British actress

Shalom Brune-Franklin, in *Great Expectations* (2023), another television adaptation, this time

from the BBC's collaboration with the American based FX television channel. Both series

feature Black actors portraying female characters who play vital roles in their respective novels.

However, these series problematically—and illogically—obscure the representation of authentic,

historical Black identities and experiences by casting Black actors in these parts because the

Black actors play roles that remain white. In other words, Black actors play the roles, but the

characters are not reimagined as anything other than the white characters presented in the

original novels. Unlike the racialization that Brontë strongly implies with Heathcliff, Dickens

does not racially mark Nancy and Estella, which means that portraying the characters with Black

actors seems historically inauthentic. Notably, Carroll maintains that racialized characterization

and presenting Black bodies in neo-Victorian adaptations "arguably serves to make visible the

historical presence of a Black diaspora in Victorian England"; however, I argue that at times the

racialization of these characters calls attention to historical inaccuracy versus meaningful

characterization, which ultimately begs the question of what it means to be Black in the

nineteenth century (16). Considering the "normal" occurrence of sexual exploitation and objectification of Black women perpetrated in the early to mid-nineteenth century when the events of *Great Expectations* take place, the filmmakers miss a potential opportunity to tell a neglected part of Black British history with "Black" female characters in both modern adaptations of *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectation*.

To be historically accurate, these female characters would have to navigate a race-based nineteenth-century class system, yet neither series considers this issue, and both ignore the socio-political implications of the racially discriminatory environment these characters would be traversing. No character in the *Oliver Twist* series ever mentions Nancy's race, and the filmmakers gloss over the traditional notion that Dickens's Nancy is a prostitute. Additionally, the implications of Nancy sacrificing herself for Oliver, as she does in both the film and the novel, take on a completely different tenor when she is played by a Black actress. This adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, like other neo-Victorian films featuring Blackness, gives the appearance of racial inclusion, but fails to meaningfully include the Black history implied by casting a Black actor in a traditionally white role.

In the case of FX's 2023 *Great Expectations*, the other characters never mention Estella's race, and the filmmakers do not racially signify Estella as Black, making the fact that the character is played by a Black actress unnecessary to either the series or its plot. Speaking specifically about casting a Black actress as Nancy in *Oliver Twist* (2007) Carroll points out that the BBC production reflects the "historical reality of Black British presence in Victorian England" (25); however, these series make no attempt to investigate the reality of the Black experience during the Victorian period and oversimplify the experience, disregarding the implication of being Black within a social structure that systematically identified Black skin as a

signification of otherness and subservience. Instead of the "historical reality" that Carroll argues these series reflect, the audience is instead presented with contradictory representations of Blackness that ignore race in the nineteenth century for the sake of racial diversity, a conception that coincides more with modern notions of race than with any historical reality. These two twentieth/twenty-first-century adaptations exemplify a contemporary trend in Victorian literary adaptations and color-blind cast selections that calls the audience's attention to Black characterization, but then renders that same Blackness invisible. Christine Geraghty clarifies the apparent paradox associated with this representation, or lack thereof:

> The policy of colour-blind casting thus seems to have two aims: to encourage casting practices which remove race and ethnicity as criteria for acting in a role and to put on stage or screen casts which will reflect what is deemed to be the ethnic diversity of contemporary Britain. In terms of reception, these aims can mean that the audience is put in a somewhat contradictory position. […] On the one hand, audiences are expected not to take ethnicity and skin colour as semiotically significant while, on the other, they are meant to recognize that the cast as a whole represents a society marked by multicultural diversity. (171)

These adaptations use color-blind casting, which simply features a diverse cast for the sake of having diversity, versus color-conscious casting, which uses the diversity to facilitate an overarching social commentary. Rachel Carroll refers to the differentiation of color-blind versus color- conscious cast selection as "performance" versus "representational" casting. Since the adaptations never rationalize or even validate these Black characterizations, I further assert that some filmmakers use the Black body as a performance prop or token in these series that denigrate the actors playing traditionally white roles. Odder still, the audience sees the Black

actor, but because the other characters ignore that the character is Black, the filmmakers

whitewash the racial aspect of the Black character that they force the audience to see by casting a

Black actor. Therefore, instead of a historically accurate portrayal of Blackness, the filmmakers

signal that race is socially irrelevant both then and now. By choosing to stifle Black character

portrayals in these series, these filmmakers take series that superficially are racially diverse and

use them, deliberately or not, to push Black representation further into the background.

Color-blind versus Color-Conscious Casting

Investigating how color-blind and color-conscious casting function within modern film

adaptations that feature diverse casts requires a brief examination of and differentiation between

the terms, often not clearly defined within literary scholarship. Color-blind casting, which

ignores an actor's race/ethnicity, is based on the concept of meritocracy, or "the 'best' actor for a

role regardless of her racial or ethnic identity" (McClellan 25). In defining color-blind casting,

Ayanna Thompson clarifies that "Color-blind casting assumes one can and should be blind to

race. As a model that prides itself on its meritocratic roots (the best actor for the best part), color-

blind casting also assumes that an actor's color has no semiotic value onstage unless it is

invested with one by the director" (78).[57] Initially a practice that originated in the theater where

Black actors frequently played various parts written as white, color-blind casting became an

essential strategy that allowed more Black actors to find work in the theater in roles for which

they would not customarily be considered, and one that shifted restrictive ideas on race within

dramaturgy. Thompson asserts that color-blind casting "also assumes that the theatre is a location

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[57] According to McClellan, "Even though the term was defined in 1986 by Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman (of the Non-Traditional Casting Project) as 'the casting of ethnic, female, or disabled actors in roles where race, ethnicity, gender, or physical ability are not necessary to the characters' or play's development', the practice remains an anomaly in theatrical, cinematic, and television casting, and the concept has been considerably critiqued in arenas adjacent to adaptation studies" (25).

that can enable a society to change long-held views of race" (78). While some scholars advocate for meritocratic casting, other scholars like Hughey see this as problematic in the case of diverse casting, claiming that "antiBlack attitudes have blended with traditional Western values such as meritocracy and individualism to form 'symbolic' or 'modern' racism" (550).

In her influential examination of color-blind casting, Rachel Carroll provides theoretical framework for discussing the representation by Black British actors in Victorian literary adaptations where they play non-racially marked roles. Aware of the contradictory "tension" inherent in color-blind casting, Rachel Carroll's primary premise situates color-blind casting as both a "representational strategy" that "serves to make visible the historical presence of Black diaspora in Victorian England," and also "a performance practice" that "invites us not to see the racial identity of the actor as relevant to his or her role as performer in a drama" (17). In simple terms, as a representational adaptation strategy that makes Blackness visible to the audience, color-blind casting expects the audience to ignore the raciality within the non-white actor playing a character originally conceived in the text as white. Therefore, according to Rachel Carroll, color-blind casting does not signify meaning because it asks the audience not to see or notice Blackness or delineate the racial identity of the actors. However, according to Ann McClellan, "although directors may think colourblind casting renders colour 'invisible,' audiences do see race, especially if the actor looks 'different' from everyone else onstage," and it is this predicament that color-blind casting poses (26).

Rachel Carroll observes Dickens does not racially signify Nancy in his source novel; therefore, there is "little evidence to suggest that [the series] production intended to foreground the experience of Black British subjects by casting Black British actors in these roles; no direct reference to their racial identity is made in these adaptations" (20). I will examine the color-blind

casting of Nancy in *Oliver Twist* (2007) later in this chapter, building on Rachel Carroll's argument that Sophie Okonedo's casting in the role reflects a "meritocratic basis" for the Black actor to play a white character rather than the producers or director applying any meaning to racial identity in the series. However, modern scholars push back on color-blind casting of Nancy by noting the problem with casting Okonedo, a Black actor, in a traditionally "white" role, then asking the series's audience to see Blackness, but then not to attribute any meaning to racial identity within a series that either relegates Blackness to the background or ignores the Black experience altogether.

Film and literary scholars are conflicted on color-blind casting and take issue with the practice that filmmakers and directors implement in contemporary media. One of the strongest detractors of color-blind casting is American playwright August Wilson, whose theatrical works frequently explore the modern experiences of the African American community and commonly feature all-Black casts in roles that Wilson specifically wrote for Black actors. In his well-known speech for the Theatre Communication Group's biennial conference, he spoke against integrated casting:

> Color-blind casting is an aberrant idea that has never had any validity other than as a tool of the Cultural Imperialist who views their American Culture, rooted in the icons of European Culture, as beyond reproach in its perfection. The idea that Blacks have their own way of responding to the world, their own values, style, linguistics, their own religion, and aesthetics is unacceptable to them. To cast us in the role of mimics is to deny us our own competence. The idea of color-blind casting is the same idea of assimilation that Black Americans have been rejecting for the past 380 years. For the record we reject it again […] In an effort to spare us the burden of being "affected by an

undesirable condition" and as a gesture of benevolence, many whites, like the proponents

of color-blind casting, say "Oh, I don'\'t see color." We want you to see us. We are Black

and beautiful. We are unique, and we are specific. We do not need color-blind casting.

(498-499)

In other words, Wilson argues that Black color-blind casting ignores the Black cultural

experience. When Black actors are cast in roles written as white, they are only mimicking

whiteness, presenting an interesting but problematic juxtaposition between the actor, the

character, and the racial identity attributed to both. Color-blind casting only further alienates the

Black body, forcing it to imitate whiteness while the audience is asked to ignore its Blackness.

McClellan specifically addresses how color-blind casting affects the Black body and the raciality

that it attempts to exclude, claiming that "the practice risks (re)colonizing Black bodies into

normalizing white narratives and perspectives, thus maintaining white privileges and supremacy"

(25). Color-blind casting is another form of Black acquiescence to white culture that signifies

further European domination over Black cultural output. The reinvention of history through

color-blind casting, particularly in period drama only erases a Black historical past that is never

adequately told.

Wilson's arguments have facilitated the debate amongst academics who also see color-

blind casting as a problematic issue. One prominent scholar, Ayanna Thompson explains, "it has

become clear that the various models of nontraditional casting can actually replicate racist

stereotypes because we have not addressed the unstable semiotics of race (when we see race;

how we see race; how we make sense of what race means within a specific production)" (77).

Kerri Ullucci and Dan Battey agree with Thompson's assessment, arguing, "While color

blindness is generally sold as a positive—that in ignoring color, racism is minimized—we will

argue that instead color blindness contributes to a collective ignorance and relieves individuals from fighting against the impact of racism" (257). Jason Smith agrees that "color-blindness can be seen as a discursive tool to discount the significance of race […] and "color-blindness can thus be seen as a political tool in which racial privileges are maintained" (781). Finally, McClellan contends, "For some scholars, colourblind casting depends upon—and perpetuates—the assumption that racism is a thing of the past and they worry that 'raceless' performances resituate the onus of racism on the individual, rather than in structural institutions" (25). Color-blind casting negates Blackness and, at the same time, denies racial identity. For these reasons, according to Pittman quoting Ayna Thompson, this type of casting "often fails to correct multicultural representation and does not adequately account for the way in which an actor's skin colour sets in motion unintended racialized meanings" (182). In color-blind casting these racialized meanings are never fully realized; instead, Blackness and the Black experience are pushed further into the background within adaptive media that feature color-blind casts. The problematic irony of color-blind casting in modern theater and film therefore lies in directors, filmmakers, and producers bringing the Black body to the forefront but then surreptitiously downplaying Blackness until they force it into the background and completely disregarded within social and historical context.

Since color-blind casting conveys a distorted reflection of Blackness to the audience, scholars like McClellan suggest that color-conscious casting is a dramaturgical framework better suited "to describ[ing] racially conscious adaptation," and "to analys[ing] these objects within their sociohistorical contexts as well as our own" (26). Or, as British actress Tanya Moodie, advocating for color-conscious rather than color-blind casting, astutely said, "I don't like asking people to be blind. I want them to see that an African woman is playing Gertrude, and then feel

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what their perspective is giving to the story" (qtd. in Thompson 172). Color-conscious casting is that which uses racial casting to make an underlying comment on social issues involving race and racial discrimination. Therefore, color-conscious casting, which assigns an actual meaning to the race of the actor playing a role, showcases the Black experience, particularly in adaptations that recreate period and historical dramas. Where color-blind casting asks the audience not to see racial identity as meaningful, color-conscious casting moves race to the foreground of a production to convey a socio-political commentary through racial diversity. Color-conscious productions acknowledge the meaning of racial identity and the context in which racial politics navigate within the social, political, or historical context of an adaptation. Ullucci and Battey maintain that color consciousness, or the notion that "recognizing others' worldviews and experiences as valid and acknowledging that such paradigms are racially informed and not monolithic," should be advantageous over color-blindness with its deference to the virtual invisibility of raciality (1200). McClellan also puts color conscious casting in perspective:

> Rather than seeking to make adaptations racially 'neutral', i.e., white, artists and critics
> need to acknowledge and address the cultural specificity of race, identity, and history
> within any ethnic, racial, or transcultural adaptation. Adaptations need to acknowledge
> how the Black actor's intersectional identity is incorporated into the text and how this
> specific racial, cultural, and socioeconomic experience informs the unique text and
> performance. (26)

As an opposing paradigm to color-blindness, color consciousness manifests itself within a framework that designates meaning to diverse casting rather than just presenting diversity for diversity's sake. With these notions concerning color-blindness versus color consciousness in mind, the representations of Nancy in *Oliver Twist* and Estella in *Great Expectations* conveyed

primarily color-blind portrayals, since race does not play a substantial role in either series, even though both characters are women of color in a racially volatile nineteenth-century Britain.

Previous Film Adaptations

To put the color-blind casting of Nancy and Estella in context, it is necessary to briefly review the most influential film adaptations of *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*.[58] Although casting people of color was a rarity in early film productions, many of the characterizations used in these early adaptations have been adopted in subsequent film and television versions, with their adaptive conventions worked into popular culture's understanding of Dickensian texts and characters. For example, Nancy's characterization as a prostitute, or the "tart with a heart" has become a common trope in filmic adaptations that highlight Nancy's morality and her motherly sacrifice for Oliver.

American and British filmmakers began adapting *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* during the silent era of films, in 1909 and 1917, respectively. The first sound filmic adaptation of *Oliver Twist* was a 1933 low-budget American adaptation of the novel; *Great Expectations* got its first sound version through another American production the following year. These early films paved the way for director David Lean's well-regarded film adaptations of both novels: *Great Expectations* in 1946 and *Oliver Twist* in 1948. Produced by the British company Cineguild Productions, Lean used essentially the same cast for both films. Scholars consider Lean's two films "definitive" as they immensely influenced—and continue to influence— Dickensian adaptive media. Speaking specifically on the impact of Lean's *Twist*, Chris Louttit asserts that "What is striking about the rich cultural afterlife of *Oliver Twist* […] is the dominant influence of one adaptation—David Lean's classic 1948 Cineguild production—on the multiple

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[58] See Appendix D.

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filmic and televisual Olivers that have followed it" (para. 4). Brian McFarland affirms that Lean's *Great Expectations* has acquired "classic status as a film and as an adaptation of Dickens" (68). The other notable *Oliver Twist* film adaptations are British director Carol Reed's musical *Oliver!* (1968), heavily influenced by David Lean's film, and Roman Polanski's 2005 *Oliver Twist*.[59] Well-regarded re-workings of *Great Expectations* are both television mini-series produced by the BBC in 1989 and in 1999.

Any racial debates surrounding Dickens's novels will inevitably center on Fagin's portrayal featuring the customary negative stereotypes often associated with Jews. Although Dickens regretted his initial portrayal of Fagin in the novel's first edition, and revised Fagin's characterization to temper the racist stereotypes. Later on, modern adaptations still struggle with how to represent Fagin in adaptations based on his racial identity. Although critics highly regard Lean's 1948 adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, they take issue with the film's grotesquely antisemitic portrayal of Fagin. Touching on the treatment of Fagin in Lean's adaptation, Rachel Carroll states that "David Lean's 1948 adaptation has achieved classic status in the adaptation canon but caused rioting in post-war Berlin because of its perceived anti-Semitism when it was first screened there" (20). With the racial controversy concerning Fagin occupying the foreground of most modern discussions concerning race in Dickensian texts, the topic of racializing Nancy and Estella, neither of whom are racially identified in their respective texts, presents a unique approach to reading these characters in terms of race and moves their traditional characterization

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[59] In 2004, a South African adaptation, *Boy Called Twist*, directed by Timothy Greene and produced from donations made by independent investors, features Jarrid Geduld, a South African biracial actor, as Twist, a character loosely based on *Oliver Twist*. Louttit addresses the cultural relevance of the small budget adaptation, saying: "the experience of early twenty-first-century Cape Town with its diverse communities, street children and no-go areas is culturally specific" (para. 4).

down a different critical trajectory. By toning down the anti-Semitism coded in Dickens's novel, filmmakers are attempting to address in a character who Dickens had already racialized.

Although Nancy and Estella are not customarily interpreted through the Black body (Blackness) in modern film and television re-interpretations of the characters, it is worth noting that Welsh singer Shirley Bassey, who is mixed race (Nigerian and English), was director Carol Reed's first choice to play Nancy in *Oliver!*; however, producers for Romulus Films felt late 1960s audiences would not accept a Black actress in the role. They were even more adamant that viewers would be even more averse to an interracial coupling between a Black Nancy and white Bill Sikes ("Internet Movie Database"). Shifting racial attitudes from the 60s to the present-day now permits a Black actress to play a "white" role, or a part traditionally written as a white character.

In 2013 British actor Lenny Henry pushed initiatives and campaigns to address the lack of diversity in British film for actors and filmmakers. According to Christine Geraghty, "Henry called for a wider range of experiences to be put on screen so that stories of those from different ethnic backgrounds can be told and a wider range of voices heard in British productions […] colour-blind casting has begun to have an impact on British screen drama" (169). The primary goal of Henry's initiatives, at least in British theater and film, is to bring in a more diverse experience conveyed through actors of color from their perspective, which adds an additional dimension to the overall themes communicated to the audience. Therefore, rather than just gratuitously presenting a color-blind cast and then ignoring any raciality in the Black actors playing (traditionally) white roles, filmmakers and theater directors should highlight, address, and confront the deeper implications of casting people of color, while also exploring racial identity and the social politics associated with the racialization of canonical white characters.

According to Jason Smith, the best way in which to continue assessing the implications of color-blind and color-conscious casting would be to further examine filmic adaptations that feature integrated casts. J. Smith asserts that "given the recent focus on color-blindness and its sociological significance, it is instructive to probe the research projects which might best explain or examine its existence. A study of films, as important cultural vehicles, may well be the best approach to illustrate the presence, or absence, of color-blindness in contemporary society" (782). With this in mind, I examine the implications of color-blind casting, particularly with a Black actor, Sophia Okonedo, portraying Nancy in *BBC's Oliver Twist* television mini-series adaptation from 2007. With the 2023 *Great Expectations* mini-series adaptation, I will also investigate the portrayal of Estella, played by East African actor, Shalom Brune-Franklin to further explore how filmmakers and directors utilize integrated casting to articulate, or not, the Black experience in modern adaptations.

Nancy in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*

A better understanding of Nancy's portrayal as a Black character in the BBC's *Oliver Twist* requires an analysis of how Dickens presents Nancy in the original novel. There have been various interpretations of Dickens's intentions involving the character, but the prevailing reading of Nancy centers on her status as a fallen woman, a common prostitute, or some iteration/combination of both categories signifying a depraved lifestyle in which she commiserates with the young thieves and pickpockets in Fagin's den and degenerately cohabits with Bill Sikes in London's criminal underworld.[60]

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[60] Modern scholarship agrees that there is a connection between Dickens's Nancy (along with the other fallen women characters in his collective works) and his charitable founding of Urania Cottage, an asylum for fallen women that he established with millionaire Angela Burdett-Coutts in 1847 (Carroll 21; Rogers 410).

Nancy as a Fallen Woman

While the established literary tradition identifies Nancy as a young prostitute, it is important to note that Victorians did not just label prostitutes as fallen women. "Fallenness" could be attributed to any woman considered socially "deviant," including thieves (like, presumably, Nancy) and even rape and incest victims.[61] Amanda Anderson notes the "fluidity" of the term in Victorian society and "its application to a range of feminine identities: prostitutes, unmarried women who engage in sexual relations with men, victims of seduction, adulteresses, as well as variously lower-class women" (2). Gretchen Braun contends that "for a female Victorian literary character, maidenly demise is preferable to sexual fall, and should physical chastity be compromised before marriage, an outcast state—from respectable society and perhaps even from God's grace—is inevitable" (342). Dickens shows sympathy for Nancy's social alienation as caused by her fallenness, and he asks the reader to look past her sexual transgression to the compassion she shows for Oliver. Although Nancy says that she has been working in Fagin's criminal enterprise since she herself was a child, Dickens gives her a moral compass and sense of shame in an effort to garner the reader's pity.[62]

Nancy as a Prostitute

Victorians regarded fallenness as a "precursor to ruin and prostitution," and the ills of poverty often played a role in promoting the transition from fallen woman to prostitute in

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[61] Although Nancy being a prostitute is not explicitly articulated in the novel itself, the novel describes Nancy and her friend Bet thusly: "They wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and looked quite stout and healthy. Being remarkably free and easy with their manners, Oliver thought them to be very nice girls indeed. Which there is no doubt they were" (Dickens 71). The women's gaudy dress and demeanor here imply that they are prostitutes. In the introduction to the 1841 third edition of the novel, Dickens specifically states "that the boys are pick-pockets, and the girl [Nancy] is a prostitute" (456).

[62] Nancy says to Fagin in Chapter 16, "I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this (pointing to Oliver). I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since […]" (Dickens 133).

nineteenth- century Britain where lower-class women had access only to limited resources

(Rogers). Dickens makes clear that poverty drives Nancy to prostitution; therefore, she is a

sympathetic character, who despite being corrupted by poverty, is still moral and humane.

Prostitution threatened the Victorian ideal of domesticity, so to the Victorians, the fallen

woman's body was a site of disease and sexual corruption, adverse to proper domestic life.

Dickens counters this narrative with characters like Nancy, using his novels to open the cultural

debate on poverty and destitution among the Victorian lower classes.[63] David Holbrook

considers the Victorian fallen woman's transition into prostitution from a cultural perspective:

> We might take a sociological point of view and suggest that […] the social opportunities
>
> open to women were so restricted […] if a gentlewoman did not marry, the only
>
> occupations open to her were those of governess and teacher. But these were only
>
> available for very respectable women; and, indeed, any lower posts in service for women
>
> of lower rank were only open to untarnished females. So there was only one path left for
>
> the woman who had been seduced and abandoned with a child, un-marriageable, and
>
> beyond being accepted in society: she had to become a prostitute or mistress, if she did
>
> not commit suicide or die of shame. (57) [64]

Nevertheless, the Victorian fallen woman, with no other recourse, was conventionally destined

for either life as a prostitute or death by her own hand. Nancy admits as much to Rose when she

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[63] Much has been written regarding how the English Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, which "initiated a change both in ways of representing prostitution and in public opinion about ways of dealing with the sexually deviant woman," forcing the fallen woman, in her role as social pariah and walking metaphor for contagion, disease, and urban decay, into Victorian social consciousness (Liggins 39).

[64] Holbrook makes an interesting observation that provides insight into Dickens's apparent fascination with fallen women: "Dickens's attitude to the women in his home for the fallen was authoritarian and paternalistic: they had to behave, to be reeducated, to follow a strict routine, and to be penitent. Then they were sent out as emigrants to start a new life. One suspects that besides satisfying Dickens's charity, they also provided him with some satisfactions for his need to triumph over and control women" (69).

laments, "Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide and leave no living thing to care for or bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last" (Dickens 389). It is only through death that the fallen woman can gain salvation from her decayed life and metaphorically ruined body, or as Nina Auerbach contends, "Victorian conventions ordain that a woman's fall ends in death" (30). Dickens concedes that although Nancy is a sympathetic character, she is also irredeemable, and therefore she must die. In death the fallen woman can no longer present a threat to the social order, nor remind society of her sin and its guilt. Although Dickens asks the audience to sympathize with the fallen Nancy, Bill Sykes still brutally murders her at the end of the novel, to suppress the threat that the fallen woman presents to conventional domesticity.

Nancy as Mother Figure

Nancy's familial illegitimacy, like Oliver's, pushes her to the outer fringes of a Victorian culture that placed enormous importance on family and domesticity. Dickens makes clear in the text that Nancy's social conditions, rather than on any moral shortcomings she may possess, is to blame for her fallenness. Therefore, her protection of Oliver makes sense if the reader assumes she identifies with him as a wayward orphan like herself. What is significant to understanding the BBC's treatment of the character remains Nancy's consistent acts of sacrifice in her (over)protection of Oliver. Nancy's sacrificial acts are clearly associated with her signification as a subverted (distorted) mother figure, and her obsessive protection of young Oliver represents the subversion of the domestic and familial expectations in Victorian society. Quoting Nancy Armstrong's influential research on the maternal figure character, Karen Tatum observes that "there are plenty of female characters, who, by virtue of Victorian domestic ideology, must exhibit some influence of their 'natural maternal instinct.' Strangely enough they do not, except for Nancy,

who is a prostitute. It is the 'mixing of illicit sexual features with the attributes of the good mother that makes [Nancy's] body the site of sexual violence'" (243). Nancy's "maternal sympathies" towards Oliver subverts Victorian domestic ideology, since her fallenness will not allow her access to traditional domestic life and her socially perverted sexuality precludes her from proper motherhood. As such, Nancy can only function as a surrogate mother to another illegitimate child like herself. Dickens portrays Nancy as a victim of strict Victorian conventions that disregard impoverished sexually exploited women, and it is within this framework that the filmmakers of the BBC's 2007 *Oliver Twist* cast a Black actress.

Nancy in BBC's *Oliver Twist* (2007)

Although Nancy is the only person of color in a primary role (there are people of color seen in the street and courtroom scenes, and there are a few Black boys among Fagin's gang in the series), the other characters are portrayed as neither seeing nor noticing Nancy's racial identity, and as Rachel Carroll notes, the production seems to "invite the viewing audience to follow their lead," thereby completely ignoring Nancy's Blackness (26).

In defining the understanding between the audience and the director surrounding color-blind casting, Geraghty explains how the audience must suspend disbelief for integrated casting to be an effective approach:

> The success of such a colour-blind strategy thus depends on the theatre audience understanding the conventions at work. Audience members need to know that they should make a distinction between actor and character and that, in this context and on this stage, ethnic origin and colour of skin are not significant in creating meaning" (170).

The color-blind casting of Sophie Okonedo as Nancy adds no additional layer or meaning to the character being of color, since the film refuses to acknowledge the implications of Nancy

as an underprivileged *Black* woman navigating Victorian England. Therefore, figuratively the Black body, signified through a Black actor, is a token figure, and in this instance, causes the audience to question why Nancy happens to be Black in the film. In expecting the audience to ignore the Blackness of the actor playing a canonically white role from the original text, the director places substantial responsibility onto the audience to first see the actor as Black, but then to also look beyond the actor's race, which inevitably alters the way the audience views both the character and the actor's performance as that character. McClellan observes the issues that ignoring race in casting presents:

> Although directors may think colourblind casting renders colour 'invisible', audiences do see race, especially if the actor looks 'different' from everyone else onstage. Rather than seeking to make adaptations racially 'neutral', i.e., white, artists and critics need to acknowledge and address the cultural specificity of race, identity, and history within any ethnic, racial, or transcultural adaptation. (25)

Key to McClellan's point are the historical implications of color-blind casting and the rewriting of history, particularly Black history, which reshapes Blackness and transforms it into the image of whiteness. The latter is demonstrated by the filmmaker's non-treatment of Nancy as a Black character without racial identity or an established personal history that would make the actor and character more accessible to the audience (25). Rachel Carroll argues that by portraying Nancy as a Black British born woman, the BBC's adaptation of *Oliver Twist* is "reflecting the historical reality of Black British presence in Victorian England" (24). However, referencing Brandi Wilkins Catanese, McClellan counters the idea that integrated casting somehow illuminates a historical representation of Black existence in nineteenth-century England: "Colourblindness divorces itself from the processes of history; since many institutions in our culture were created

through concentrated inattention to nonwhite culture in order to normalize whiteness, the attempted sleight of hand that is color blindness (as nonrecognition) 'ultimately supports the supremacy of white interests'" (36). Because the film suppresses Blackness for the sake of white characterization, the BBC's *Oliver Twist* ignores an opportunity to add dimensions to the Nancy character as Black and also to comment on the Black experience in Victorian England for the benefit of modern audiences. Dickens's original novel is one concerned primarily with reality, and particularly the grim reality of poverty in Victorian London. However, instead of portraying another facet of Victorian reality—the nineteenth-century Black British experience—the televisual adaptation integrates a Black character into Dickens's tale while disregarding the implications associated with being Black in a predominately white social order.

Recent historical scholarship confirms that there was a considerable Black population living in Victorian Britain, primarily in urban areas like London. Due to the transatlantic slave trade, "thousands of people of African origin were living in London and other major port cities, including sailors who had served on British ships, former or escaped slaves from the British colonies, and those in flight from America […]" (Rachel Carroll 19). Many Black Victorians were either born in England or brought over as freed slaves. As slavery was abolished in 1833 throughout the British Empire, a few Black Victorians migrated into middle to upper class lifestyles. However, more than half of the Black population in Britain lived in poverty or near destitution. Many worked as domestic servants or prostitutes, living at or below the poverty line ("Black Victorians"). [65] Black Victorian women who were mainly on the lower rungs of the social ladder worked primarily as servants, but there was a smaller number who had to resort to

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[65] By the nineteenth century historians estimate over 20,000 Black servants lived in London ("Britain's First Black Community").

prostitution, usually working alongside their white counterparts as sex workers in Southwark and in the brothel area of Turnmill Street in Clerkenwell ("Black Victorians"). The histories of these Black Victorian women are virtually unknown, and while scholars are still uncovering facts about the Black experience during the Victorian period, understanding and interpreting the unique perspective of these women, even via fictional accounts of their lives, would be most illuminating to modern audiences apparently enthusiastic for period dramas and adaptations featuring people of color, as can be seen in the recent popularity of television series like Netflix's racially mixed Regency-era mini-series *Bridgerton*.[66]

With this brief overview of the historical presence of Black Victorians in mind, it would not be implausible to read Nancy as a Black woman navigating this time and space in nineteenth-century London, surviving as a domestic servant or even a prostitute. However, through the film's color-blind casting, director Coky Giedroyc does not attribute any meaning to his casting Nancy as Black; therefore, the Black Victorian experience that the role could have commanded remains hidden to the film's modern audiences. In this instance, Okonedo is, as August Wilson asserts, playing a role of mimicry since the film suppresses her Blackness, along with the Black cultural experience she could have embodied. The film depicts Okonedo in a role written as white; however, the actress simply imitates whiteness while the audience watches.

Because the characters never acknowledge Nancy's Black characterization in the drama, she represents a two-dimensional trope of Blackness. Her sacrificial acts towards Oliver and her poverty-stricken illegitimacy would mean something completely different if the film portrayed

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[66] Amma Asante's 2014 British period drama film *Belle*, set in the eighteenth century, details the real-life account of biracial aristocrat and abolitionist, Dido Elizabeth Belle. The film was a critical and financial success. Netflix's *Bridgerton*, a Regency-era television mini-series featuring a racially integrated cast "is the most popular English language series in Netflix history." Season 2 of the series which aired in April 2022 tallied over 620 million viewing hours (Nasha Smith). Hughey observes that the popularity of these mainstream period dramas with integrated casts lead "some scholars to view televisual media as a dynamic medium receptive to public demands for diversity and empowerment" (546).

her as a raced woman. Therefore, color-blind casting in this instance does nothing to illuminate Nancy's Blackness, but instead reduces her to a Black stereotype in the same tenor as the magical negro figure, a stereotypical depiction of subservient Blackness. The magical negro frequently masquerades in films as the advancement of Black representation but is another vehicle to advance white characters within the film's plot. According to Hughey:

> Within this milieu, I note the emergence of an explicitly positive, but latently racist character in Hollywood film-the "magical negro" ("MN"). The MN has become a stock character that often appears as a lower class, uneducated Black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation. (544)

As a Black character, Nancy's martyrdom for the sake of saving Oliver from Sikes epitomizes the secondary role the magical negro plays to white male "self-actualization" without granting interiority to Nancy, who remains outside the social structure. Nancy selflessly saves Oliver with no obvious gain for herself and in fact she rescues him to her detriment. Notably, when Brownlow accuses Nancy of being mercenary in her intentions towards Oliver, she furiously retorts: "I'm risking everything, and you think I want a few coins?" (S1 E2: 44:39). Nancy's unyielding devotion and willingness to "risk everything" despite the threat of death to help Oliver is yet another example of the magical negro trope. Hughey further delineates the magical negro figure:

> In order for the MN to dedicate his mission to white redemption while enduring his own economic depression, these films draw upon the idea that Black folks are, underneath all

the politically correct discourse, simple and unsophisticated people that desire an

uncomplicated life of servitude. Despite the MN's economically vulnerable situation, his

or her only joy appears in helping white people, not him or herself. (556)

Although in one scene Nancy defiantly tells Bill Sikes, "I'm not your servant," there are several

instances in the series where Nancy does take on a subservient, almost servant-like role to protect

Oliver, catering to him and singling him out from the other boys in Fagin's gang (for example,

S1 E2: 10:36). Her preferential treatment of Oliver is most notable here because there are Black

boys among the gang who appear to share a similar ethnic background with Nancy, but whom

she never engages with or even acknowledges. Hughes refers to Nancy's preferring to save

Oliver over the Black boys as the "myth of redemption and salvation," whereby filmmakers

portray "whiteness is always worthy of being saved," and dominant depictions of Blackness are

"acceptable in so long as they serve white identities" (548). Nancy tells Sikes, "I told him you

would keep him safe," to which Bill later replies, "What is it with you and that boy?" (S1 E2:

30:17). Sikes asks a valid question of Nancy here, since Giedroyc provides no logical link

between Nancy, as a racialized character, and Oliver, a young white street orphan that she

protects until her death.

Nancy clearly exhibits a motherly protectiveness in the novel; however, in the series, the

racialized Nancy is overly protective, to the point of being almost excessive in her affinity to

Oliver. Her actions compel the audience to question why she would favor Oliver over the other

boys, especially the Black boys who are similar in social and racial class to herself. The magical

negro exists only to show the importance of the white character, and Nancy's favoritism towards

Oliver reinforces her role as such, primarily because she is willing to become a martyr for a

white child she hardly knows. As a magical negro figure in the series, Nancy does not

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necessarily have "magical" or supernatural powers initially, but it is worth noting that as with Dickens's original text, the series Nancy becomes supernatural after Sikes murders her. Her ghost haunts him, thereafter, leading him to hang himself as retribution for her murder. Supernaturality is often associated with the magical negro trope since this aspect of Blackness can be interpreted as less threatening to whiteness. Hughes interprets supernaturality in context of the magical negro, claiming that "when Black actors are constantly cast as angels, spirits, gods, and other incarnate supernatural forces, they displace the realities of history into more viewer-friendly narratives," and these Black stereotypical roles are intended to reassure a white audience so anxious about current racial strife that "it must be replaced by fantastical stories of magic" (548). Hughes's point concerning the displacement of historical realities correlates with this project's previous discussions on erasing the Black experience in cinematic adaptations for the sake of color-blind casting, and its sanitization of a historical past associated with Victorian Black men and women. By ignoring Nancy's Blackness, and thereby refusing to recognize Black histories, the BBC's *Oliver Twist* would prefer to depict the superficiality of Nancy as a supernatural phantom haunting her murderous lover, rather than portray the actual reality of a Black woman trying to endure poverty and racism in nineteenth-century Britain.

On many levels, the magical negro trope recalls the concept of the noble savage, who is innately benevolent and in this goodness is happy to acquiesce to white dominance. Approaching the idea from an American perspective, Hughey addresses this connection:

In many ways, today's correlation of Blackness as a moral principle is built upon the historically entrenched discourse of the 'Noble Savage.' In the Eurocentric imagination of the eighteenth century, Africans and indigenous "new world" peoples were said to have noble qualities: harmony with nature, generosity, child-like simplicity, a disdain of

materialistic luxury, moral courage, natural happiness even under duress, and a natural or

innate morality. (564)

Approaching from a more global perspective, Pittman agrees with Hughey's observation, adding:

"While the magical negro develops as a distinct feature of American racial history, its roots in

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fetishizing of the 'Noble Savage' render it part of a Western

European vocabulary of race as well" (184). These stock characters, the magical negro and noble

savage, represent the safe Black character, who has a prominent presence in the film, as a non-

threatening subservient to the white characters. Casting Okonedo as Nancy stymies the character

and actually regresses any apparent diversity, making Black casting in this instance more

problematic than if a white actor were playing the role. This example of color-blind casting only

presents an illusion of progressive and race forward representation, since Nancy's portrayal

further renders the Black experience invisible and reinforces stereotypes that ignores Black

Victorians' histories.

Estella in Dickens's *Great Expectations*

Influenced by the BBC's 2007 *Oliver Twist* adaptation, FX's 2023 *Great Expectations*, a

two-part television series, also utilizes color-blind casting that sanitizes the depiction of

Blackness and ignores the racialized aspects associated with casting Black actors. This is

particularly evident in the casting of Shalom Brune-Franklin in the role of Estella, a traditionally

white character. Because the color-blind casting completely disregards the representation of the

Black body implied by casting Black actors, the series objectifies Estella's Black

characterization, or, as McClellan points out, the color-blind casting just "recolonizes Black

bodies" to normalize the white perspective and white culture as a part of disregarding Black

identity (25). In defining the social psychological circumstances associated with the act of

objectification, Jessica LaCroix and Felicia Pratto explain that "the two necessary conditions of objectification are 1) that the Agent treats the Other not just as a thing, but specifically as an instrumental tool to be used for the Agent's particular purpose, and 2) that the Agent also denies or fails to acknowledge some aspect of the Other's personhood – his or her autonomy, agency, or subjective experiences" (185). Color-blind casting, therefore, is an act of objectification or a process of oppression that recolonizes personhood. In Dickens's novel, Estella's objectification by Miss Havisham and Pip invites a corrective in modern film adaptations; however, in this case, as we will see later in the chapter, the televisual adaptation sets up conditions for Estella to be another objectified de-personed Black character in service to the white male protagonist's construction of himself.

There is a well-established textual interpretation of Dickens's *Great Expectations* that speaks to Miss Havisham and Pip continually reducing Estella to an object of value for their own personal gain. Gail Houston asserts that Miss Havisham makes Estella "a thing to be bartered in the marriage market" (158), and Sean Gross similarly observes that Pip "writes persistently as if Miss Havisham has some proprietorship in Estella [and] Miss Havisham makes Estella seem to exist as pure commodity without volition" (622). Miss Havisham undoubtedly sees Estella as a means for enacting revenge on masculinity: she controls Estella, leaving her daughter with few options but to be a sexual tool for men. According to Kuckuk, "Estella's objectification as a 'plaything' allows her to tease and provoke men, but she 'plays', or does so, only at Miss Havisham's command" (17). In Houston's words, "Estella views herself as Miss Havisham's ornamental object, to be dangled before men to tantalize them and break their hearts" (159).

It is Miss Havisham herself who establishes the tenor for how Pip consistently objectifies Estella throughout the novel. As a result, Pip comes to fetishize Estella as an object that he

obsessively covets, eventually hoping to inherit her like any other possession he believes Miss Havisham should bequeath to him. Pip expects to inherit more than just monetary value from Miss Havisham's estate, however, since his greatest expectation is to fully possess Estella, as "a prize" that he will eventually receive, contingent upon his ascension to a higher social class (Dickens 29). Haig agrees that "Estella is thus proposed as a kind of prize – clinching link in the chain – that Pip may achieve once he has picked his treacherous passage through the marshes guided only by the beacon of his own fallible judgement" (53). Defining Estella as a "clinching link in the chain" further reflects her signification as a beautiful object whose value lies in her beauty rather than in any other character trait she possesses. Estella is a commodity passed on or inherited from those characters who choose to covet her for their own benefit. Estella's perspective within the text is ignored, since she is treated like an object dominated by those around her.

Estella in FX's *Great Expectations* (2023)

In many ways the objectification of Estella carries over from the novel to the film in the manner in which the character, a Black woman cast in a traditionally white role, is objectified for the viewing audience's gratification. Unsurprisingly, one of the most problematic issues that critics had with FX's *Great Expectations* was the casting of Estella as a woman of color with no references in the series to her being Black. Deconstructing how the film racializes Estella hinges on McClellan's argument that color-blind casting is a form of "'recolonization' that normalizes white narratives and perspectives, thus maintaining white privileges and supremacy" (25). The recolonization that McClellan associates with integrated casting can link to Dickens's novel, which itself builds upon Estella's objectification, which is in turn often a byproduct of the

colonization process. In providing a social psychological link between colonization and objectification, LaCroix and Pratto provide a thorough rationalization:

> In order for a case to classify as objectification, the Other must be perceived as *merely* instrumental, i.e., useful but lacking autonomy, agency, and/or experiences [...] Research on media portrayals of women and minorities, stereotypes and legitimizing myths, paternalism, dehumanization, and moral concern explore how Others are denied autonomy, agency, and subjective experiences. However, denial of autonomy is not necessarily a required feature of objectification, and in some instances, Agents may co-opt Others' agency or emotions for their own purposes […] deny or ignore at least one aspect of the Other's personhood while instrumentalizing another. (200)

These theoretical approaches to objectification further support the notion that Estella's racialization in the televisual adaptation gives no perspective to the Black character in the series's narrative by completely disregarding the Black experience, and the series's color-blind casting serves to recolonize the Black body, forcing it to perform as a white character whose role is not rationalized in the series's predominately white space. Racializing Estella, then ignoring her as a person of color, strips any Black dimensionality away for the sake of portraying a traditional white character as Black. FX's *Great Expectations* ignores the upper-class Black Victorian experience, which in reality did exist, and represented an elite class of which Estella would have been a member as Miss Havisham's wealthy Black daughter. Even though the film moves Estella's ethnicity to the background, Black histories and identities were prevalent in Victorian society, and Estella would have been one of "the thousands of people of African origin living in London" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rachel Carroll 19). Current histories reveal there was a strong Black presence not in just the lower classes, but also in the

middle and upper classes as well (Gerzina 2). An interesting consideration is that Black
Victorians even moved among the British monarchy: Sarah Forbes Bonetta, an African Princess
turned wealthy socialite who was allegedly presented to Queen Victoria as a "gift," became the
queen's goddaughter and married a wealthy Black British businessman (Anim-Addo 11).

Considering these historical references to Black Victorians positioned on the upper rungs
of the Victorian social ladder, the color-blind casting of Estella would seem realistic on its face;
however, the filmmakers never position the character as a Black woman in a space that allows
her to express how her Blackness would work in a white social environment. What is even more
questionable about the color-blind casting of Estella is the series's portrayal of Pip, who, as in
Dickens's novel, still hopes to enter upper-class society with Estella as a manifestation of his
transition to a higher social status. However, his motivations in the series seem illogical, as he
expects to make this treacherous social leap while in an interracial marriage to a Black wife,
moving through a racially prejudiced British social system.[67]

At times, the series seems to want to be color-conscious. Mr. Jaggers is played by Afro-
British actor and rapper Ashley Thomas, and Molly, Estella's mother and Jaggers's housekeeper
is portrayed by Rhoda Ofori-Attan, a Ghanaian-British actor. Nevertheless, as with Estella's
characterization, the film denies these Black characters any depth within the plot, making the
color-blind casting contradictory to the realities of the time period, and therefore confusing to the
modern audience.

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[67] The interracial relationship that Pip and Estella have in the series was not necessarily uncommon in
eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain. David Killingray asserts: "Interracial marriage clearly occurred, although
there is little evidence as to the extent, or how such marriages were viewed by the white population. Black-white
liaisons are not uncommon in the visual record of the eighteenth century. Written accounts are rare, but there is
evidence […]" (53).

The Black presence in Victorian London was a direct consequence of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, which displaced both Black men and women who subsequently settled in areas in and around London (Rachel Carroll 19). There is a strong undercurrent of enslavement in FX's *Great Expectations*, and in fact the series mentions the institution of slavery in various scenes. One notable early example is Pip and Joe refusing to make manacles, chains, and shackles when slave traders traveling to the smithy offer them sums of money. Another noteworthy instance is Miss Havisham's comment that her ballroom at Satis House was "built by my father on the proceeds of indigo, opium, and slaves" (0:43:23). Finally, one last mention of slavery concerns the scheme that Jaggers and Pip run against Drummle that involves an illegal slave cargo. When Pip asks Jaggers about freeing the slaves, Jaggers pointedly responds that slavery "is [of] no consequence to me" (0:20:20). While these scenes initially appear to bring issues concerning Blackness to the narrative forefront, most of these scenes are brief and the characters do not elaborate on slavery or any issue that concerns Black experience in Victorian society. In these instances, slavery is a byproduct that never fully develops in the series to put the characters in any historical context. In her influential film reimaging Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Andrea Arnold raises the stakes with her adaptation by casting Black actors in the role of Heathcliff, whose character Arnold definitively embodies as an abandoned African slave. Carroll asserts that Arnold "made a significant and important departure from classic casting convention" by creating a new space of inclusion for Heathcliff as a Black character (19). Unlike Arnold's treatment of Heathcliff, however, in FX's adaptation, the various references concerning slavery are never directed at Estella, and there is no suggestion or

implication that she was ever enslaved prior to being adopted by Miss Havisham.[68] These examples prove that the reinvention of history through color-blind casting, particularly in period drama, only erases a Black historical past that is never adequately told.

Modern neo-Victorian adaptations often attempt to correct the absence of race in traditional texts by communicating a reimagined Black experience to modern audiences eager for diverse perspectives in the media. However, *Great Expectations* does not present a corrective because it uses color-blind casting techniques that put Black actors on screen without investigating or allowing them to exhibit their inner selves. Casting women of color, but disregarding race, effectively ignores the Black viewpoint as promised, and like the source literature erases the Black presence. Therefore, color-blind casting represents a disconnect between Black bodies and Black interiorities and the failure to retrieve a realistically historical experience.

Color-Consciousness and Racebending in Victorian Film Adaptations

Ulluci and Battey maintain that color consciousnesses, or the notion that "recognizing others' worldviews and experiences as valid and acknowledging that such paradigms are racially informed and not monolithic," should be advantageous over color-blindness in films, as color-conscious casting defers to the virtual invisibility of raciality (1200). McClellan argues that "the practice [of both colourblind and colour-conscious casting] still seems to focus on the individual actor. That is, both colourblind and colour-conscious casting examines how changing a particular character's racial identity does (or does not) alter the relationships between characters, themes, and the audience's perceptions of the performance" (26). According to J. Smith, "the

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[68] In a heated exchange that occurs when Miss Havisham tells Estella that she will marry Drummle, Miss Havisham comments, "Girls of your birth really don't have choices" (0:37:17). This remark is extremely ambiguous and could refer to Estella's race or her lowly station. But it is worth noting that in the series, Estella does not become aware of her parentage until much later.

oppositional political tool for combating color blindness would be colorconsciousness. As racial

events unfold, the goal for colorconsciousness is to (a) expose the assumed neutrality of

Whiteness, (b) validate the experiences and perspectives of people of color, (c) name racist

practices, and (d) point out institutional racism" (782). Films could incorporate more color

conscious casting or even use racebending, which inverts the stories by making their entire casts

Black. Some scholars argue that racebending is more inclusive and courageous. McClellan

advocates for racebending the cast:

> For example, an article or book chapter might focus on the effects of racebending Don
>
> Pedro's character in *Much Ado About Nothing* by casting Denzel Washington in the role,
>
> but the rest of the cast (and fictional world) remains foundationally white. It's as if the
>
> audience is expected to simply ignore the fact that Don Pedro is Black. In contrast,
>
> ABSH builds a fictional world where all of the characters are Black; the entire racial
>
> norm has been inverted, reversed from a white dominated vision to an all-Black one.
>
> Such a shift seems to have more impact than if just Sherlock Holmes had been cast with a
>
> Black actor. Rather, every person in the film is Black: the hero, his sidekick, the clients,
>
> the villains, even the secondary characters. (26)

However, scholars like August Wilson push back on this inverted casting, labeling it just as

problematic as color-blind casting because this inversion still stifles the Black experience:

> To mount an all-Black production of *Death of A Salesman* or any other play conceived
>
> for white actors as an investigation of the human condition through the specific of white
>
> culture is to deny us our own humanity, our own history, and the need to make our own
>
> investigations from the cultural ground on which we stand as Black Americans. It is an
>
> assault on our presence, our difficult but honorable history in America, and an insult to

our intelligence, our playwrights, and our many and varied contributions to the society

and the world at large. (499)

In other words, according to Wilson, racebending is a rejection of Black identity because the

Black actor still plays a role intended, for a white actor. Mostly problematically, the Black actor

still mimics someone else's history rather than establishing her own narrative. Wilson argues that

racebending, like color-casting, is not a progressive technique; it is a denial of a racialized self,

disavowal of Black honor, and a rejection of the contributions that African Americans have made

to society.

Retrospection

Scholars argue that color-blind casting, or the practice of casting actors in productions

regardless of race, is actually another form of racism, because it dehumanizes Black bodies and

ignores their existence within a cultural space. The reinvention of history through color-blind

casting, particularly in period dramas, only erases a Black historical past that is never adequately

told. Moreover, that is all it *can* do: blindness cannot, by definition, see those histories revealed.

The contemporary adaptations of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (2007) and *Great Expectations* (2023)

attempt to make a Black presence visible within these period dramas by casting Black actors in

white roles. However, color-blind casting ignores the social implications and apparent challenges

that would have faced Black Victorians attempting to navigate a racially restricted social

structure. Some scholars have suggested racebending, which uses all Black actors or actors of

color in a traditionally white production, as a more corrective adaptive technique over color-

blind casting to ensure the emphasis of the Black perspective. But scholarship disagrees

concerning the effectiveness of racebending to properly, and realistically, present Black culture.

In the next chapter, we will see adaptations where color-conscious decisions have meaning and

the examples from the texts have clear implications regarding the deep complexities of skin color

and race in both the past and present moments.

CHAPTER FOUR:

BLOODLINES AND BLACK BODIES: VAMPIRISM AS BLACK ENSLAVEMENT

IN WILLIAM CRANE'S *BLACULA* AND RODNEY BARNES'S

BLACULA: RETURN OF THE KING

Along with Frankenstein's Creature from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the vampire, most familiar through Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), still one of the most identifiable and adaptable characters from nineteenth-century fiction, remains a popular cultural figure in contemporary film and literary media. Commenting on the durability of the vampire character in literary adaptations, adaptation scholar, Thomas Leitch makes a trenchant analogy, claiming, "One of the hoariest clichés in the field is that adaptations act like vampires in sucking the life out of the passive, helpless progenitor texts who enable their existence, often unwittingly or unwillingly, but are powerless to control their excesses" ("Vampire Adaptation" 5). Notwithstanding Leitch's opinions on the efficacy of comparing the state of vampirism to the process of adaptation, the comparison seems most appropriate considering the prolific adaptative afterlives of the vampire figure and the literary legacy handed down through this characterization.

Rather than exsanguinating life from the source text, adaptations can revitalize the original characters and plotlines, reincarnating the work into a new medium that provides a continuing afterlife. In her influential study of adaptation, Hutcheon resists efforts that compare the adaptive process to vampirism; however, she does concede that adaptations "keep [the] prior

work alive, giving it an afterlife, it would never have had otherwise" (206). The notion of an "afterlife" or "undeath" for texts, in which the past serves as a source of inspiration for the present, is what keeps works "alive." In this way, adaptations are indeed vampiric since, like vampires, adaptations pass on an immortal spirit that originates from the original, ensuring a continued legacy of the original work. According to Susan Hayward, adaptation "creates a new story; it is not the same as the original but takes on a new life, as indeed do the characters. Narrative and characters become independent of the original even though both are based – in terms of genesis – on the original" (11). Therefore, the literary legacy of Stoker's *Dracula*, a giant in vampire lore, infects other texts that will be examined in this chapter: the blaxploitation film *Blacula* (1972) and the graphic novel *Blacula: Return of the King* (2023), both based primarily on Stoker's character as the quintessential vampire and a figure of adaptation in contemporary popular culture. *Dracula* provides a clear indication that the original text is not dead; on the contrary, the adaptive reiterations grounded in Stoker's novel prolong the life of the original material, thereby allowing it to persist in other iterations, in this instance as a film and a graphic novel.

  Blacula (a film) and *Blacula: Return of the King* (a graphic novel) follow their own adaptation processes in unique ways. However, both gain strength from the audience's memory of their common source novel, *Dracula*. As such, the appeal of these adaptations for the audience is the nostalgia of the familiar. As Hutcheon argues, audience interest "comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (4). At the center of the source text and its adaptations are themes of legacy, heritage, and the passing down of cultural inheritance that in itself relates to vampirism as it represents an immortal bloodline, conveyed from one generation to the next, never dying out. In the case of *Blacula*, and

Blacula: Return of the King, the concept of black vampirism is a metaphor for the past legacy of slavery that remains undead, continuing to affect Black people in the present.

Blacula, directed by William Crane, attempts to reconcile the boundary between Blackness and vampirism to construct a narrative about enslavement and liberation. At the core of the film's story is Mamuwalde (William Marshall), an African prince cursed to be a vampire by Count Dracula, characterized in the film as a white supremacist who advocates for the slave trade that Mamuwalde hopes to eradicate with Dracula's help. As a blaxploitation film, there are troubling racial elements and stereotypical characterizations, but modern critics, like Brooks Hefner, have argued that there needs to be a "rethinking" of the film's racial tropes and a more pointed conversation on an underlying message that the film promotes of the 1970s Black Power Movement and Black empowerment. At the film's core, however, is the cruel savagery of Mamuwalde's vampirism that turns African Americans, the descendants of his own race of people, a race of people he desperately advocated to free from slavery, into enslaved vampiric inarticulate zombies destined themselves to prey on their own poverty-ridden urban spaces. Examining the film in this light reveals the paradox inherent in most blaxploitation films from the 1970s; on the one hand, *Blacula* presents representations of Black empowerment and liberation; on the other, Mamuwalde preys on his own people through vampirism and relegates them to an undeath that manifests as another form of black subjugation. The subtext of the film amplifies the same trite stereotypes about African Americans and the Black urban experience.

Blacula: Return of the King, written and illustrated, respectively, by Rodney Barnes and Jason Shawn Alexander, is an intriguing 2023 graphic novelization that reimagines *Blacula* while simultaneously building on the narrative of the *Dracula* novel and the *Blacula* film, further advancing both media as a part of the mythos created by Stoker's text and further developed in

Crane's film. The reinterpretation of the Dracula and Blacula characters in the graphic novel attempts to remedy challenging racial aspects of Blacula's (dis)embodiment as a Black vampire, primarily his predation and subsequent vampiric enslavement of the other Black characters that plays out in the film. The graphic text redirects the revenge narrative of *Blacula* with the African prince Mamuwalde finally confronting the Anglo Count Dracula, who imposed his vampiric enslavement, for a final racially charged showdown between the black oppressed and the white oppressor. The graphic novel makes a shift from the original film as it dramatizes, often violently, the consequences of Mamuwalde's preying on blacks, explains how the Black victims of his vampiric curse are marginalized since the film's events, and depicts the liberation of Mamuwalde and his Black victims from Count Dracula's sadistic control. The film portrays marginalized African Americans as buffoonish, promiscuous, or violent stereotyped caricatures; however, the graphic novel strives to portray the humanity in these Black characters suffering from a vampiric curse inflicted/cast upon them by another Black body.

Both the film and the graphic novel demonstrate the relationship between vampirism, Blackness, and enslavement. The vampire as a figure of slavery demonstrates the historical and social dynamics associated with a legacy of black disenfranchisement, race-based discrimination, and societal injustice. This point is doubly true in the case of the Black vampire, who literally and figuratively embodies the intersection between the supernatural and historical trauma of enslavement rooted in black exploitation. In both media, Blackness is personified through vampirism as a metaphor for past physical enslavement and present mental subjugation experienced by Black people surviving a devastating legacy of slavery, drugs, and police brutality in the U.S. As Harry Benshoff asserts, "Blacula's vampirism is an explicit metaphor for slavery" (38). Still more problematic is that the film ends with Mamuwalde's suicidal death with

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no proper resolution as to the fate of the Black people he has perpetually enslaved as vampires. Therefore, although *Blacula* endeavors to portray a message of Black pride and empowerment, the film conveys a narrow perspective of Blackness as it characterizes Black identity as savage and violent, which only serves to reinforce black stereotypes that play directly into racist myths about the urban Black experience in the U.S. However, the graphic novel attempts to move away from the film's racially problematic implications by permitting the Black characters, including Mamuwalde, to repossess their selfhood and agency to eradicate the mental enslavement associated with racial disenfranchisement signified by black vampirism. While reimagining elements of the classic novel and recontextualizing the *Blacula* film, the graphic novelization moves to rectify the film's issue of Blacula feeding on other blacks for retribution.

The Black Vampire as a Symbol of Slavery

The correlation between slavery and vampirism exemplifies the trauma of enslavement as the vampire symbolizes, the monstrous undead, who exposes the destructive consequences of racial subjugation. The vampire is a powerful representation of slavery since both conditions connote a parasitic feeding on another body that dehumanizes personhood; the insatiable bloodlust compels the vampire to disregard the agency of another human being, simply reducing the individual to an object for consumption.

Speaking about the connection between slavery and vampirism, Sarah Kent cites Frederick Douglass's famous denunciation of slavery as a "bloody transaction" when she asserts that "with the blood stains that linger from legacies of slavery, envisioning vampirism's bloody transactions in relation to slavery is semiotically logical" (739). As Kent goes on to characterize the *Black* vampire, she admits that the figure is less semiotically stable as he embodies a link "between vampirism, blackness, and histories of racial violence" (739). The Black vampire

serves as a metaphor for the consequences of racial trauma as he embodies the struggles that enslaved people faced from systemic abuse, brutality, and exploitation. The act of feeding on the blood of others signifies exploitation, and this symbolic connection emphasizes the parasitic relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. However, the Black vampire archetype is a paradoxical and even more complicated figure than the white vampire since the Black vampire is a metaphorical being who stands in for the dehumanization of slavery and the commodification of Black bodies. The Black vampire also subverts the very concept of vampirism, and he unleashes his parasitic feeding and bloodlust on to other victims like himself. Therefore, the Black vampire, is at once the oppressor and the oppressed as he degrades and objectifies other bodies, creating a legacy of oppression.

Although modern popular culture considers Stoker's *Dracula* to be the quintessential vampire novel, the Black vampire has strong literary roots. One of the early novels to consider vampirism in the wake of slavery is *The Black Vampyre* (1819), an American novella, often considered the first black vampire text, written by Uriah Derick D'Arcy (White and Faherty 5).[69] *The Black Vampyre*, a parody of Dr. John William Polidori's 1819 novel *The Vampyre*, is set in St. Domingo and tells the story of an African boy, sold into slavery and who, despite his white enslaver's attempts on his life, ends up killing the white slave owner and the slave owner's infant son. Years later, the boy, now a young man, disguises himself as a Moorish prince and marries

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[69] Scholars are unsure of *The Black Vampyre*'s authorship. An 1845 reprinting of the novel gives attribution to Robert C. Sands; however, most recently, Katie Bray suggests that the author could also be Richard Varick Dey, an anagram of the listed author's name "Uriah Derick D'Arcy." Bray suggests that "*The Black Vampyre* has two possible authors: Richard Varick Dey and Robert Charles Sands. Richard Varick Dey (1801-1837) graduated from Columbia College in 1818, New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1822, and was the pastor of the Congregational Church in Greenfield, Connecticut, and the Reformed Church in Vandewater Street, New York City (Labaw 34). Robert Charles Sands (1799-1832) graduated from Columbia College in 1815. Although he was trained as a lawyer, he wrote for *The Literary Review*, managed *The Atlantic*, and edited *The New York Review*. He was associated with Washington Irving and the Knickerbocker group" (19).

the owner's widow, revealing after the marriage that he is, in fact, a vampire and proceeds to turn his new wife into a vampire as well. At the novel's end, a group of vampires, including the prince and his wife, join a band of runaway slaves to plot a revolt against the immortals/enslavers; however, the military foils their scheme by killing all of them. The prince and his wife, who discover she is pregnant with the prince's biracial son, manage to escape and end up settling in New Jersey. The story concludes with the narrator revealing that he is a direct descendant of the prince's son and that he suspects a reoccurring intestinal ailment could be cravings from his inherited vampirism.[70]

There is a strong connection between slavery and vampirism in D'Arcy's text. The link is even more persuasive with a Black vampire as the story's protagonist, particularly "an African who was taken to the New World as a slave [and] D'Arcy was quick to use vampirism as a metaphor for a number of concerns of 1819 New York" (White and Faherty 5). In addressing the story's underlying themes, Katie Bray concedes that the narrative is an unusual intertextual text that discusses more than vampirism being a metaphor for slavery. She also asserts that *The Black Vampyre*'s allegory of vampirism is a "theoretical condemnation of the '"vampires"' who profit from the labor of others," an implicit denunciation of the commodification of forced labor through the slave trade (17). Bray goes on to opine:

> *The Black Vampyre* uses vampirism as a metaphor for theft, and, by explicitly theorizing
> that metaphor, it highlights the similarities in form, if not in consequence, between
> plagiarist authors taking credit for the words of others and slave owners profiting from
> the labor of enslaved workers…The developing forms of capitalism are emphatically

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[70] *The Vampyre*, initially attributed to Lord Byron, was published in 1819 and first conceived by Polidori during the famous ghost story contest at Lord Byron's Villa Diodati in Geneva, Switzerland where Mary Shelley devised her novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818).

linked with both the vampire's violence in sucking life from the living and the horror of

dead-but-undead institutions (4).

While *The Black Vampyre* uses vampirism as a metaphor to address the rather unusual themes of

plagiarism and authorship as they relate to slavery, the novella is also concerned with the concept

of miscegenation through the mixing of black/white/vampire blood, an apparent reference to

blood heritage and the legacy that will eventually be a central theme for future vampire stories to

follow.

Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897) is another early text that marries

vampirism and slavery. Published in the same year as Stoker's *Dracula*, Marryat's novel features

a protagonist, Harriet Brandt, a mixed-race Jamaican heiress, who unintentionally kills three

people, including a baby, draining their life force with her touch. When the other characters link

Harriet to the deaths, they accuse her of having both black and vampire blood. At the end of the

story, Harriet discovers her father was a white physician, who experimented on his slaves; the

same slaves killed him in an uprising. Harriet's mother was a Creole slave with a thirst for blood,

implying that her mother was a vampire. Eventually, Harriet commits suicide after

unintentionally killing her husband on their honeymoon.

In the novel, Marryat does not associate the traditional concept of blood heritage with

vampirism, she instead manifests vampirism through slavery, portraying the protagonist as a

mixed-race girl whose father was white and whose mother was a Creole slave cursed with

vampirism. Even though Marryat presents a unique depiction of vampirism, the link between

slavery and the vampiric remains critical to the narrative. The vampirism here is not supernatural

or even adequately explained. However, the direct reference to vampire blood implies that

Harriet is somehow draining, figuratively sucking the life of her victims, albeit unintentionally. It

is clear from the narrative that Harriet has what Helena Ifill refers to as the "curse of heredity," concerning Harriet's racial makeup and "the fatal attributes of the Vampire that affected her mother's birth" (78-79). Due to her deadly hereditary makeup, Harriet's doctor instructs her not to marry or even pursue intimate relationships at all, or she risks killing again. Ifill elaborates on the notions of race, ethnicity, and tainted blood:

> Miscegenation counted as one way of polluting the bloodline. Harriet is a danger because of her mother's bloodlust, instigated by the bite of the vampire bat, and also because she is descended from slaves: the Baroness's accusation of Harriet tellingly references her "black blood" and her "vampire's blood" in the same sentence […] Yet Harriet's ability to pass as white, with her "colourless but clear" skin and "straight and small" nose (4) allows her the freedom to approach, and entice, Englishmen, making her an effective threat to white blood" […] A focus on this novel's enactment of late-Victorian British fears of degeneration – particularly resulting from miscegenation – positions Harriet as the dangerous "Other" in line with readings of *Dracula* as a reverse invasion narrative. (82-83)

The existential threat is that Harriet can pass for and marry white, spreading her undetectable black blood from generation to generation, which in turn "plays into fin-de-siècle concerns that hereditary degeneration could be anywhere – hidden or latent – even in those who believe themselves to be 'normal' and respectable" (Ifill 85). The greatest threat to whites during this time was mixed-race Black people, who for all purposes looked white, passing undetected into white society, thereby literally and figuratively spreading black blood throughout white upper-class society.

As D'Arcy's and Marryat's novels demonstrate, the Black vampire experienced a robust literary tradition in the nineteenth century, and narratives that connected vampirism, enslavement, and tainted bloodlines articulated the trauma associated with chattel slavery. A cursory review of Black vampire literature of the long nineteenth century reveals that contemporary writers and filmmakers who depict the Black vampire figure in their various literature pick up where these texts left off before Stoker's novel. There has been a noticeable change in how modern literature and films portray the Black vampire, with authors employing the character as a means of regaining agency and identity. Novels such as Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) and Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) prove that modern revisionists are reimagining the vampire mythos and shifting the narrative by presenting Black vampires as strong, durable creatures that reject victimization, creating a space for control and power. The Black vampire has become a familiar figure in popular culture, not just in literature but also in films like *Blacula* (1972) and Spike Lee's *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* (2014). While modern depictions of Black vampires have metamorphosed from a direct association with slavery, vampirism has now moved to urban poverty-ridden environs that signify the legacy of slavery and its far-reaching effects on contemporary African Americans and their culture. It is this literary tradition that contextualizes vampirism as a symbol of race-based oppression that *Dracula* ignores, and films like *Blacula* utilize to highlight modern social issues existing within a cultural moment.

Abjection and the (Black) Vampire

When considering the intertextuality between *Dracula*, *Blacula*, and *Blacula: Return of the King*, Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject puts into focus space between the Black body,

slavery, and vampirism underlying these three media.[71] According to Kristeva, abjection is the feeling of horror, disgust, or repulsion that one experiences from an object, in opposition to the subject manifested by selfhood, that is usually suppressed or that which is outside the Self. Kristeva says the abject does not "respect borders, positions, rules," and it ultimately "disturbs identity, system, order" (*Powers* 4). Therefore, Kristeva argues that the self rejects anything outside the order to maintain stability. Specifically, the self differentiates between the "I" self and the other, or as Kristeva explains, "I experiences abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me.' Not at all another with whom I identify and incorporate, but an other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be" (*Powers* 10). Although otherness defines self by what it is not, these two states of being are constantly at odds, contradictory since abjection will never allow the self to accept the other.

Abjection and Slavery

The basic principle of Kristeva's abject theory is that the components that are socially and culturally marginalized and pose a challenge to existing norms are represented by the abject. The system of slavery may be seen from the perspective of the oppressed since it entails the deliberate dehumanization of people and their reduction to a position that is inferior in the eyes of the powerful. According to Davis, "In America, slavery designated the Black body as ugly, subhuman, and sexually available, requiring regulation and correction. The Black body is the perfect picture of abjection: dark, dirty, and not White. The Black body represents a triple loss—absolute domination, biological alienation, and social death" (150). In the framework of slavery, the abject includes actions that violate human limits, such as the dehumanizing of victims, the

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[71] Julia Kristeva explains the concept of intertextuality: "[A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (*Desire* 66).

denial of their agency, and the forcible reduction of persons to a subaltern position. In defining

slavery and the abject within the cultural identity, or lack thereof, of African Americans, Davis

further claims:

> America's primordial racial classification is the social otherness of Blacks. Slavery
>
> established the permanent, violent domination of inherently alienated and dishonored
>
> persons. The Black body in America has been simultaneously repulsive and desirable in
>
> ways that White bodies have not […] Within the racial polity, Blackness is almost an
>
> identity, yet still an abject identity. (147)

Within the framework of slavery, the abject presents a means to define the imaginary borders

established to legitimize the systems of enslavement. Kristeva highlights the psychological

effects of experiencing the abject, stressing the unease and disgust it causes (*Powers* 11). When

applied to slavery, the abject further demonstrates how those in power used the abject as a

mental, emotional, and spiritual weapon to dehumanize the enslaved and degrade their

personhood. Enslaved Black bodies were institutionally commodified as an act of complete and

total objectification. The violent brutality and degradation inherent in slavery resulted in a

psychological horror that not only impacted the enslaved but also affected the collected society,

leaving a fixed mark of slavery that permanently impacted the cultural order and established a

legacy of trauma that permeated throughout generations.

Abjection and Vampirism

The concept of a border or barrier that divides the self from the other is central to the

abject. The vampire frequently personifies this blurring of borders. On this point, Kristeva is

clear that the abject is "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (*Powers* 4). Therefore,

because of their capacity to straddle the space between life and death, vampires subvert social

mores and elicit an instinctive reaction in both readers and characters. The depraved aspect of the vampire is its capacity to transcend the conventional bounds of life and death. Kristeva defines this transcendent space as "the place where meaning collapses" (*Powers* 2). Building on Kristeva's definition, Kelley Hurley locates this place "at the *limen* or threshold between opposing conceptual categories, and so can be defined by both and neither of them" (323, author emphasis).

Kristeva highlights the role the body plays in expressing the abject, and the vampire's characteristics often display traits that make its body abject. For instance, bloodsucking is a personal infiltration of the body that breaches both literal and symbolic boundaries. Referencing Noël Carroll's groundbreaking philosophical research in horror psychology, Rina Arya discusses how horror monsters, including vampires and zombies, both walking corpses, use bodily fluids, particularly blood, to activate abjective horror: "many of the substances that are associated with monsters, such as blood and mucus, are impure because they are in between 'categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on' […] In their decomposed states, the monsters typically want to contaminate their victims with fluids" (134). The vampire, a parasitic animated corpse, represents the ultimate abject as he defiles and contaminates his victims. However, the vampire's threat is not only signified by his decomposed body, the prime locus of abjection, but also in his blood, an abject bodily fluid that intersects the border between inside/out and life/death that, in the vampire's case, disseminates vampiric corruption. To restore the order that he disrupts, the vampire, according to Sabrina Boyer, is "often represented as an outsider or 'other' [and] the vampire archetype has established itself in our collective unconscious to represent difference" (21). Barbara Creed remarks on the state of the corpse concerning abjection, noting that "Within the biblical context, the corpse is also

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utterly abject. It signifies one of the most basic forms of pollution – the body without a soul. As a form of waste, it represents the opposite of the spiritual, the religious symbolic. Creed goes on to say, "In relation to the horror film, it is relevant to note that several of the most popular horrific figures are bodies without souls (the vampire)" […] ("Horror" 47).

While the vampire's transitory existence challenges the natural order and adds even more to his reprehensible nature, in literature, frequently, the vampire represents a seductive character, and his desirability often blurs the border between pleasure and peril. The dehumanizing aspect of these interactions is the way that they subvert sexual conventions and combine desire with the risk of danger. The vampire symbolizes the psychological effects of forbidden impulses and the underlying conflict between attraction and repulsion by merging aversion with sexuality. The monstrous desirability that the vampire represents creates a mental uncertainty, a psychological ambiguity that makes the vampire figure even more abject. On this point of the abject, Kristeva points out, "Abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it -- on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (*Powers* 9-10). In other words, the abjective danger of the vampire, whose corporeality as a walking corpse feeding on and contaminating others through blood, lies in his monstrous seductiveness, an object of desire that confounds reason. As I explain in the introduction, the textual and film adaptations that regularly incorporate the vampire figure are also abject since they are in a condition of transitory existence. Adaptive media is unstable and destructive to systematic order, like the objectionable vampire commonly adapted in modern media.

Abjection and Blacula

Reading *Blacula* in terms of abjection conceptualizes ideas associated with selfhood, identity, and the rejection of otherness. This rejection transforms Mamuwalde, the Black vampire, into a signification of the ultimate Other. The primary objects considered in *Blacula* embody the concept of the abject, as Kristeva says:

> The abjection of Self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of Self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (*Powers* 5)

The "want" Kristeva references here could apply to Mamuwalde's constant want, his need, for revenge upon Dracula, which manifests itself, not in direct revenge against the white establishment that Dracula represents but against the Black victims subjugated to a white dominant society that insists on othering Blackness to move it outside the social order.

Dracula and Blacula are vampires, walking undead and they reflect Kristeva's important point about the corpse, an extreme example of the abject that poses the most danger to self-identity. Kristeva asserts, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and engulfs us" (*Powers* 4). Abjection to a corpse is a reaction to a breach of boundaries between life (self) and death (other). Therefore, the corpse as a signification of death is rejected because it links the self to its eventual mortality, and if the corpse "represents

fundamental pollution" to the order, then the undead corpse, or the *black* undead corpse, presents the most threat to selfhood (Kristeva, *Powers* 109).

The concept of vampirism has evolved in popular culture from an aristocratic white European legacy, with vampirism passing on this white heritage. In *Blacula*, a white vampire makes Mamuwalde into a Black vampire. Reminiscent of the "one drop rule" involved with racial heredity and the white supremacist fears of racial miscegenation, Blacula is the "carrier" of Dracula's white vampiric infection, resulting in the Black body not only contaminated but rendered monstrous by the white body.[72] *Blacula* depicts an act of self-destruction to purge the Black body of white European contamination. In the film, Mamuwalde destroys himself, but his efforts seem futile since he has contaminated so many other Black victims with corrupted blood tainted with whiteness. Notable with *Blacula*, however, is the fact that Prince Mamuwalde is also a member of the noble class. He is *African* aristocracy, and as Black nobility he disrupts the European legacy that has infected him. Now, he is reintroducing Black blood or a Black heritage to the urban Black people cut off from African nativity by European contamination.

The *Black* vampire is forced further outside the social order, beyond and past the white vampire. As such, the Black vampire confounds the boundaries between self and other and is rejected as abjected Other twofold. According to Brandon Davis, "Race creates an altered conceptualization of abjection […] Racial abjection is a powerful mythological, psychological, and physical response to the Black body […] This is the ability and desire of Whites to witness Black pain and suffering" (143). On a personal level, the Black vampire abjects self as he loathes

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[72] The "one drop rule" was used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a method for defining racial identity, particularly in the Southern United States, where the rape of Black women by white men was not illegal and often produced biracial children. The rule designated that "one drop of Black blood makes a person Black;" therefore, persons with the slightest hint of Black heritage were required to identify as black (Hickman 1163). The rule's primary purpose was to deny mixed-raced children the privileges they might have had due to their half-white parentage, particularly any claims of inheritance (Fhagen-Smith 167).

the desire for blood but chooses to prey on black blood as it represents heritage and a reflection

of self. In this light, Mamuwalde, as a vampire, "becomes a dangerous masculine Other from the

gothic past who threatens the modern African American male self" (Medovoi 11-12). The Black

vampire's sexuality is even more significant to the metaphors linking it to slavery. This

sexualization reflects past prejudices and anxieties about the relationship between power, desire,

and race.

Blaxploitation and *Blacula* (1972)

Blacula is one of the more respected filmic entries in the blaxploitation genre popularized

during the 1970s. Defined as "movies made by black and white filmmakers in the attempt to

capitalize on the African American film audience," the genre's target was predominately black

viewers, the films featured all-black cast and crew, and the settings were urban areas with large

cityscapes as backdrops (Lawrence 14). In general, some fans of blaxploitation films consider

them empowering and racially aware, since this genre highlights Black representation in film

media that has been previously ignored. However, critics of the genre view blaxploitation films

as culturally harmful in their stereotypical portrayals of Black people as criminals, particularly

drug dealers, pimps, and prostitutes. These films also cast Black urban neighborhoods as crime

and poverty-ridden ghettos, further perpetuating Black cultural stereotypes and racial clichés

detrimental to perceptions of Black urbanity in U.S. cities.

The hallmarks of the blaxploitation genre are strong Black characters who frequently

overcome difficult societal obstacles while navigating in and around urban settings. The

protagonists are anti-establishment individuals, who fight against systemic racism for the

betterment of their community. Blaxploitation films feature iconic characters, like John Shaft

(Richard Roundtree) in *Shaft* 1971, Superfly/Young Priest (Ron O'Neil) in *Superfly*, 1972, and

Foxy Brown (Pam Grier) in *Foxy Brown*, 1974, all prominent figures to Black audiences craving

heroes and role models that look like them. According to Novotny Lawrence, these heroes had a

keen sense of justice, street smarts, ingenuity, and fighting expertise (16). Another important

feature of blaxploitation films is the distinctive and bold visual aesthetics that make these films

so distinguishable, specifically the colorful and flashy costumes and the urban environments that

give the films a more realistic feel (Benshoff). These visual elements, coupled with the Black

cast made blaxploitation films distinctive compared to the conventional Hollywood movies

produced at the time. Peter Lev places the blaxploitation films in historical context:

> The presentation of African Americans in Hollywood film changed dramatically in the
>
> years around 1970. In response to the social changes of the time, a series of films starred
>
> proud, aggressive African American heroes. Many of these were fairly standard action
>
> films featuring black athletes such as Jim Brown, O.J. Simpson, and Fred Williamson.
>
> However, more original views of fiercely independent black heroes came from *Sweet*
>
> *Sweetback's Badasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1969), *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971),
>
> and *Superfly* (Gordon Parks Jr., 1972). These three films used slang, music, fashion, and
>
> attitude to define current trends and concerns within the African American community.
>
> (127-128)

The blaxploitation plotlines, which frequently center around violence, sex, and drugs became

standard conventions of the film's unique genre, and it was the films' storylines that drew the

most condemnation from critics of the films who disparaged the storylines as unoriginal, cliched,

and formulaic (Lawrence 15). A last distinctive component of the blaxploitation films that

accompany the flashy visuals and cinematography is the celebrated original music composed for

the genre. The music integrated diverse musical genres, such as jazz, soul, and funk to produce a

distinctive accompanying soundtrack. Much of the music was composed by icons of the music industry, for example, James Brown, Isaac Hayes, and Curtis Mayfield, who all brought their distinct sounds to each film's soundtrack. The music's message is one of social consciousness that vocalizes the daily experience of being Black in the inner city.

A part of the critique of the blaxploitation films' storylines is the assessment of their critical value. Recently, the genre has consistently come under fire for sensationalizing social ills within the Black urban communities while advancing a predictable narrative and supporting certain racial biases. Despite these criticisms, blaxploitation movies continue to be a significant part of the American cinematic canvas and have initiated vital discussions about Black identity and representation.

Blacula and *Blacula: Return of the King*

Though Black vampires in contemporary media have evolved from being directly associated with slavery, vampirism represents the history of slavery and its profound impacts on today's African Americans and their culture. To that end, *Blacula* is set against the backdrop of a decaying urban setting, which reflects the economic inequality, dilapidated neighborhoods, and poverty-ridden surroundings common in some African American communities. Mamuwalde becomes Blacula after Dracula curses him with vampirism, symbolizing Black communities' fight against injustices frequently perpetrated by the white establishment. As an African prince turned into a vampire by a white vampire, Mamuwalde serves as a potent metaphor for the historical struggles that African Americans have experienced, limited to urban poverty, despite having a rich African heritage that they lost through slavery.

Although a loose adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula, Blacula* moves away from Stoker's novel to include a socio-political commentary centered around the Black Pride

movement popular in the 1970s. The film's release corresponded with the civil unrest prevalent in Black neighborhoods across the United States, and doubts about the welfare state's viability were on the rise. Highlighting the enduring impact of slavery, Saidiya Hartman asserts, "If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America ... [it is] because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery" (6). Dale Hudson also situates *Blacula* film within the trajectory of slavery acknowledging, "*Blacula* performs a type of historiography. With 10 percent of the US population descended from enslaved Africans, fictionalized and semi-fictionalized histories satisfy a hunger for Black history because substantive primary documents are often nonexistent. *Blacula* recovers a violent and inhumane moment" (135). Vampirism, servitude, and polluted bloodlines are symbolically connected in *Blacula* to express the lasting legacy of chattel slavery, and the white contamination of the Black body through vampiric contagion.

A defining scene that historicizes *Blacula* and links *Dracula* and the traditional concept of vampirism to racialization is at the beginning of the film when African prince Mamuwalde and his wife Luva visit Count Dracula to advocate for the abolition of slavery in 1780. Though the couple asks Dracula's help to stop the slave trade, he expresses the merits of slavery, mainly that he could purchase Luva and have his way with her. Dracula's behavior enrages Mamuwalde, and he moves to attack Dracula. However, the Count's henchmen overpower Mamuwalde, and it is at this point that Dracula enslaves Mamuwalde by turning him into a vampire in a show of bigotry and white supremacy. In an allusion to the traditional renaming that replaced the African name with a more European moniker of actual slaves, the filmic Dracula mocks Mamuwalde, cursing him thusly: "I shall place a curse of suffering on you ... I curse you with *my* name. You

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shall be ... Blacula!" (emphasis added, 0:05:13). Commenting on Mamuwalde's reidentification through Dracula, Kent acknowledges the clear connection to slavery, stating that "Dracula's renaming of Mamuwalde echoes the historic experience of chattel slavery, when black subjects were renamed to reflect the slave–master's ownership […] Mamuwalde's new name marks his enslavement" (745). John Muir definitively declares that "Blacula" is indeed Mamuwalde's "slave name" (174). Lawrence further explains the implications of slavery in Dracula renaming Mamuwalde: "This renaming parallels that endured by African slaves at the hands of whites after they were unwillingly shipped to America […] thus, *Blacula* is equating white slave owners with the white vampire master, and 'Blacula' is Mamuwalde's slave name" (22). Mamuwalde's renaming designates his new enslavement as a vampire and it also reidentifies him as half Black and half vampire. The hybridity that Mamuwalde embodies blurs boundaries between black and vampire, making him more alienated and closer to the abject as a black version or an imitation of the "original" white vampire.[73]

The vampire identity imposed upon Mamuwalde now defines him, relegating him to a subservient, subjugated position dominated by Dracula as a representation of white oppression and supremacy. This also demonstrates the abject since it is the racialized version of the white vampire, the Black vampire, who is part black and part vampire but is not the *actual* vampire. Similarly, the name Blacula, a bastardization of Dracula's name, signifies that Blacula is not Dracula but is instead a disorientating imitation of the "original" Dracula. Therefore, the name

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[73] Homi Bhabha speaks of the hybridity of the self that engages in "colonial mimicry" and longs for a "recognizable Other [..] *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (415; author emphasis). For Bhabha, discourse is taken into context as *almost the same, but not quite*," or "*almost the same but not white*" disrupts discourse and transforms it into the ambiguity that "fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence (418; author emphasis). When Dracula curses Mamuwalde; he says, "you will be a vampire like myself" (0:05:15); however, as a black imitation of the "original" white vampire, Blacula's personhood comes into question since he is being defined by what he is not. He is not like Dracula, the original vampire; the Black vampire is an imitation of the original.

"Blacula" is a racial epithet that Dracula uses to distort Mamuwalde's identity to degrade and abject his Blackness. Mamuwalde's renaming connotes a change of identity, an identity controlled by white supremacy rather than Black power, indicating how the message of Black empowerment is blurred in blaxploitation films since these films promote Black liberation, but depict problematic images of Black stereotypes. Within this blaxploitation framework, *Blacula* contradicts itself by negating Black agency. Therefore, a reading of *Blacula* as an empowering narrative is confounded by its limits on Black articulation and agency.

After transforming Mamuwalde into a vampire and renaming him, Dracula sadistically entombs the Prince in Dracula's castle, leaving Mamuwalde to suffer an insatiable bloodlust he cannot satisfy. Dracula also entombs Mamuwalde's wife Luva, but the Count instead leaves her to die. The film then fast forwards to the 1970s "present," where an antique-dealing couple purchases the residual antiques left in Castle Dracula, including the coffin where Mamuwalde remains after almost two hundred years.[74] The couple unknowingly ships Mamuwalde in the coffin to urban Los Angeles. In this location, the remainder of the film takes place. Critics equate the film's depiction of Mamuwalde's vampiric transformation, his two hundred years of confinement, and subsequent "forced" transportation to America on a ship as a clear diasporic journey. Hudson contends, "The film acknowledges chattel slavery as a part of U.S. history Mamuwalde […] is sold as the property of Count Dracula's estate. His involuntary immigration as cargo evokes the colonial connection between immigration and commerce in transatlantic

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[74] The antique dealers are an interracial gay couple who are portrayed in an overly stereotyped and comedic fashion, which according to Medovoi, is typical for blaxploitation films. Medovoi asserts, "Critics have tended to read this sequence as wholly unsympathetic to the gay antique hunter couple; they often see it as a mere trotting out of gay stereotypes for comedic effect or worse, as an embodiment of the loss of African pride and a degeneration into modern sexual decadence" (66).

slave trade" (135). Taking the metaphor of Mamuwalde's figurative diaspora even further, Kent equates this plotline in *Blacula* to the Middle Passage and the persistent legacy of slavery:

> The staying-power of slavery mirrors the atemporality of the vampire. Two hundred years after his transformation at the hands of Count Dracula, Mamuwalde's coffin is purchased by antique hunters, who ship the coffin from Transylvania to inner-city Los Angeles, mimicking the movement across the Middle Passage. The Middle Passage, as *Blacula* reminds us, is a coffin; it is a totalizing rupture. Mamuwalde's awakening in the narrative's contemporary moment reveals that little has changed, as the social order continues to rely on the overrepresentation of whiteness as the marker of the human. Slavery stagnates. (742)

While the 1780 scene depicting Mamuwalde's vampiric enslavement demonstrates an obvious connection to slavery in the past, its lasting connection to the present is also manifested in Mamuwalde's vampirism. Reading this scene historically, in tense, from past to present, demonstrates the lasting impact of slavery on modern African Americans. Considering the concept of temporality here, by connecting enslavement with vampirism, the *Blacula* film roots slavery in the past but grounds the legacy of slavery in the present, and at times, the film presents itself as an inverted slave narrative. As a part of the past, Mamuwalde represents the othered abject because of his Blackness and vampirism, making him bi-racial and, therefore, doubly abject, pushing him further to the fringes of society. Ironically, however, it is vampirism that causes Mamuwalde to enslave his own Black people, the same race he initially hoped to liberate. Later in the chapter, we will see how the graphic novel attempts to reconcile Mamuwalde's abjection by liberating him and the other Black vampires he has preyed upon by resituating the slave narrative the film conveys.

Although Mamuwalde's story seems grounded in slavery, it is much more than a slave narrative since his vampirism moves his condition down a different, even more problematic, trajectory, and the savagery he commits against other blacks redefines how racial violence is portrayed in the film. When Mamuwalde awakens from his coffin, he brutally attacks and bites the interior design couple, being particularly vicious to Bobby, the couple's Black member, who fights back but Mamuwalde kills him. What is compelling in this scene is Mamuwalde's first act of violence is committed against an interracial gay couple, a clear symbol of the abject, as they are placed far outside the order due to their raciality and sexuality.[75] Mamuwalde's brutal and savagery perpetrated in the present time translates to the violent consumption of another Black man and with Bobby's vampirism, venal dissemination of a vampire contagion will eventually spread throughout the black urban community of LA. The Black-on-Black violence that Mamuwalde commits in the present, Dracula first initiates in the past – a past dominated racist white supremacy and the devastating after-effects of enslavement.

The consumption of Black bodies pervades *Blacula*'s narrative. This consumption begins with Dracula, who transmits the curse to Mamuwalde, who then infects his Black victims in Los Angeles with a vampiric scourge born from white corruption. Lawrence argues that although Mamuwalde is a victim of circumstance to Anglo-European vampirism, "he possesses the same bloodlust as his antecedents, it manifests itself as a curse. For example, prior to attacking his victims Blacula [Mamuwalde] undergoes a metamorphosis that transforms him from noble aristocrat to savage. Hair grows out of his face, which makes him appear more like a wolfman

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[75] Medovoi juxtaposes the interracial gay couple, Billy and Bobby, with heterosexual African Mamuwalde and Luva arguing that the two couples' relationships signify the subversion of Black male/female relations within the social construct operating in the U.S. for African Americans. According to Medovoi, how the film portrays the gay couple as "degenerate and ridiculous, comes to figure slavery's damaging effect on Black character" (7). Held up to the African prince Mamuwalde and his queen Luva, as they represent a past of black dignity and power, Medovoi argues, Billy and Bobby signal a present that embodies "the loss of African pride and a degeneration into modern sexual decadence" (7).

than the regal Count Dracula" (19). Mamuwalde's fractured identity as both dead/undead, man/monster causes him to hate the vampiric curse forced upon him on one hand, and to feed upon poor Black victims on the other. Notably, after the gay couple, Mamuwalde's next victims are a disrespectful female cab driver, an obvious stereotype of the "angry Black woman" trope, and a scantily dressed female photographer, another racial and gender stereotype. Although Mamuwalde appears to select these women randomly, they are both marked for destruction due to their degenerative class status. These Black females, whom Medovoi says are "sexually coded," represent the African pride eventually lost due to the slave trade, and their class status, race, and gender, all but make their victimization by Mamuwalde inevitable (8).

Blacula implies that Mamuwalde's primary objective is to enact revenge for his vampiric enslavement, but his actions seem contradictory and misguided since he only preys on African Americans. Additionally, as an African prince, Mamuwalde's interactions with the other Black characters demonstrate his arrogant disdain for the modern African Americans he sees as inferiors; therefore, he seems to prey on the Black characters he feels are beneath him. In one exemplary scene, Mamuwalde joins Tina with her sister Michelle and Michelle's boyfriend, Dr. Gordon Thomas, the apparent equivalent to Stoker's Van Helsing character in *Dracula*, at a disco nightclub. As Mamuwalde sits at the table, he dismisses one of their Black male friends who compliment him. Mamuwalde's disdain for this man is obvious and he ignores his comments. Lawerence comments on this scene, explicitly addressing Mamuwalde's social disconnect from the African Americans:

> Blacula's appearance in the nightclub that Tina frequents positions him as an outsider […] His unfamiliarity with modern cultural norms further adds to his peculiarity […] He arrives wearing a black ensemble, which is topped off by a black cape. He behaves in

aristocratic fashion ordering champagne instead of beer. Furthermore, when Blacula

speaks he is extremely articulate and proper, and does not use slang like the other

characters […] Blacula is an oddity among contemporary blacks […]. (21)

Mamuwalde's awkwardness in his interactions with the modern Black people he encounters at

the disco illustrates another instance where he undermines traditional ideas of what it means to

be black. Unlike contemporary African Americans, he has a direct connection back to the *pays*

natal, or the African native country that blacks in America have been severed from due to

slavery.[76] Therefore, his mannerisms and dress are more refined than those of modern black

people, suggesting a contrast between the urban decay that prevails inner city for African

Americans still versus an African legacy of pride and self-worth that is lost to them.

One narrative thread that runs through the film is Mamuwalde's relationship with Tina, a

contemporary re-embodiment of his wife, Princess Luva. Seeing Tina as the reincarnation of his

dead wife, Mamuwalde pursues her, finally convincing Tina that she is his lost love. After

Mamuwalde reveals to Tina that he is a vampire, he gives her a choice, telling her, "You must

come to me freely, with love or not at all. I will not take you by force and I will not return"

(0:51:15). Hefner points out that "Mamuwalde construes Tina's potential transformation as a

consensual one in which her choice is paramount" (67). In other words, having Tina's consent to

vampirism is tantamount to Mamuwalde. The aristocratic and cultured side of Mamuwalde will

not allow him to force himself on Tina; unfortunately, however, Mamuwalde's savage vampire

alter ego refuses to give his Black victims the same choice as he indiscriminately feeds on them,

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[76] Referencing Aimé Césaire, Micheal Dash writes about the "disembodied subject" and the journey across "estranging waters," which disengages the body with the "pays natal" (332). Dash uses this analogy to define the exile of people of color from their native lands because of slavery and colonialism. Dash sees this exile as a "dismemberment" that longs for a "reintegration of the lost body" to its nativity, where native discourse is restored (334).

all the while spreading vampirism throughout the neighborhood in an unending cycle of violence. His spread of the vampirism contagion throughout urban Los Angeles in mirrors the global spread of slavery in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, making Mamuwalde's predation on his urban Black victims while simultaneously denying their agency not unlike the inhumanity that Mamuwalde experienced when Dracula turned him.

Mamuwalde indiscriminately creates a community of mindless Black zombies that were already outsiders to the system that denies them any socio-political power because they are Black, who are even more so now that they are vampiric monsters. In this context, *Blacula* is keeping with the racist notion that Black people, particularly urban Black people, are savage, brutal, and monstrous. This also perpetuates the racist myth that Black people often prey on each other in frequent Black-on-Black criminality. Mamuwalde's feeding on the Black population, turning them into the imbecilic "undead" is reminiscent of how drugs, frequently introduced into Black communities, often transform these communities into an urban "ghettos." Leerom Medovoi addresses this point, maintaining, "Given that so many blaxploitation films deal with drug plots against the Black community, one could perhaps read *Blacula* as an exploration of the vampiric devastation wreaked by the drugs trade on the neighborhood of South Central. This too is a form of historical damage that originates in white culture but takes on a black face in the community" (19). The Black community that Mamuwalde preys upon further signifies the Black-on-Black violence narrative that white supremacists try to paint Black urban areas. In *Blacula*, Mamuwalde's victimization of the Black people is heightened since it is a Black man who is preying on these people. However, as we will see below, when we turn to *Blacula: Return of the King*, the primary culpability for this corrupt vampiric legacy that spreads through the neighborhood lies with Dracula, who started the contagion, and the makes it clear to the reader

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that Dracula, as a symbol of the white establishment, should bear most of the responsibility for the chaos he has instigated.

Although *Blacula* presents itself as a horror film, at its core is a socio-political undercurrent that consistently runs beneath its surface. No better scene illustrates the marrying of two narrative points than the warehouse scene at the film's climax. In the film's most dramatic moment, the LAPD confronts Mamuwalde at an abandoned warehouse where the viewer sees, quite graphically, that all the monstrous blacks he has turned into vampires are living in states of vampiric zombification, appearing like strung-out addicts. Although Hudson identifies these vampires as Mamuwalde's *white* victims, these vampires are a group of *Black* victims that Mamuwalde has turned and who are all wandering around as inarticulate monsters spreading the vampiric contagion (27). Mamuwalde's confrontation with the police as they are surrounded and attacked by the Black vampires is a culmination of the revenge narrative that has driven him throughout the film to commit acts of violence against other Black people. Kent notes that since Mamuwalde is "unable to confront Dracula in person, the Black vampire targets the police, explicitly framed as a racist institution, as a proxy for enacting revenge on white ideology" (747). However, Mamuwalde also targets his own race of people, who instead of liberating, he enslaves. The warehouse scene shows how Mamuwalde's displaced antagonism has unfairly affected African Americans With this scene, the film reminds the audience of the rash of Black protest riots that broke out in response to racial inequality and urban poverty in predominately Black neighborhoods during the 1960s.[77] Mamuwalde and his Black vampires put up a force of

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[77] Between 1964-1969, race riots occurred in several U.S. cities, including New York, Los Angeles (Watts area), Philadelphia, and Chicago. The Watts riots in the summer of 1965 and the 1968 riots, in response to Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, are the most notable. The much-publicized 1968 investigation by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, NAACD, commissioned by Lyndon Johnson blamed the riots on racial discrimination and segregation, claiming that the U.S. was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white-separate and unequal […] Reaction to last summer's disorders has quickened the movement and deepened the division" (11). Although there have been many theories, the true cause of the riots is still being studied (Brazil 568).

Black resistance against institutional police corruption, combating the white police officers with obvious implications that this police system unfairly targets Blacks. Kent further acknowledges, "the police [in *Blacula*] are simply a reincarnation of slave governmentality and another appendage of the racializing assemblage" (748). However, this fact of a "slave governmentality" that drives Mamuwalde to seek revenge against the white law enforcement only highlights that the ultimate victims are the innocent Black people forcibly transformed into vampires and caught in the racial crossfire between Mamuwalde's wrath and the white establishment that he strives to destroy at all costs. As we will see, the graphic novel attempts to remedy the paradox created by Mamuwalde preying on the same Black people that he hoped to liberate by transferring the blame from Mamuwalde to Dracula as the symbol of systematic racism.

Tina/Luva dies at the end of the film and rather than live without her, Mamuwalde, goes out into the sunlight and commits suicide. Kent reads Mamuwalde's suicide at the end of the film as "an act of self-liberation," yet before his vampirism, Mamuwalde's chief mission was a *collective* emancipation of all black suffering from the eighteenth-century slave trade (754). After Mamuwalde's vampiric transformation, however, his primary concern is his revenge on the white establishment and reclaiming Luva/Tina, whom he allegedly loves, but whom he is also willing to contaminate with the plague of vampirism that he considers a white man's curse. Mamuwalde's death is only sacrificial if he chooses to save those Black vampires who he has resigned to a life (death) of vampirism since the film leaves ambiguous what happens to Mamuwalde's Black victims. Moreover, Mamuwalde's death appears to be another method to control the Black body through its utter destruction. Critics like Hudson read Mamuwalde's suicide as "empowering;" however, it seems as if the Black body, at least in this instance, is put in check by an inescapable, violent, and graphic death. This is one of the problematic elements of

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Blacula that the graphic novel chooses to rectify. Instead of destroying the Black body, the graphic novel's narrative re-orients it to a place of prominence that disrupts the enduring legacy of Black servitude and oppression.

Moving forward fifty years from the film, *Blacula: Return of the King* re-establishes the troublesome racial themes presented in *Blacula* to resolve the tainted legacy and unresolved trauma approached in the movie. Using *Blacula* as a popular and familiar frame of reference from the past, *Blacula: Return of the King* admits the film's narrative needs amending in some way; therefore, by recontextualizing the *Blacula* story, the graphic novel bridges the boundaries between the new and unfamiliar. Previously, this project explored Victor LaValle's graphic novel, *Destroyer*, a reworking of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* that resurrects Shelley's Creature, yet another Victorian monster, like Dracula, is frequently used in contemporary media as a figure of adaptation who speaks to cultural concerns of race, discrimination, and social injustice. Like *Destroyer*, *Blacula: Return of the King* replaces the original Creature to make room for a new literary incarnation. *Destroyer* adds to the Frankensteinian cultural legacy, while *Blacula: Return of the King* seeks to restore Blacula's ethnic heritage, thereby creating a new aspect of the story and character that moves alongside the original film. Rather than completely eradicating the Blacula figure at the end of the story, as *Destroyer* does with Shelley's Creature and as the *Blacula* film does, the graphic novel resurrects the Black vampire figure as a persistent symbol for Black oppression and transformed into a metaphor for Black agency and resistance. In these instances, the adaptive process reveals that at the center of these graphic novels lies a rich literary legacy that articulates concepts concerning heritage and remediation of problematic textual themes. *Blacula: Return of the King* engages in an adaptive process that re-animates a

dead text in response to a cultural trend to confront a problematic aspect of the cultural legacy left by the source text, in this case the film *Blacula*.

In its own time, *Blacula* interrupts the persistent impact that slavery has on African American culture by presenting a Black vampire that disrupts Black cultural stereotypes, but also on other levels, fails to preserve the Black body. As a blaxploitation film Blacula continues to perpetuate the myth of Black-on-Black crime and other racial tropes associated with Black experience in the U.S. In the film, Mamuwalde is powerless to end the cycle of white corruption that has infiltrated his body and caused his abjection, so he self-destructs, or destructs self to end his own oppression.[78] In *Blacula: Return of the King*, Barnes advances the *Blacula* narrative by sanitizing the racial stereotypes that plague the *Blacula's* plot. In re-imagining the Blacula character as a figure of revenge against the white establishment, represented by Dracula, Barnes repairs an African American heritage devasted by discrimination and servitude. Mamuwalde interrupts the slavery legacy associated with Blackness. Notably, Barnes remediates Black representation without destroying the Black body, thereby rendering a more resilient Black character. In Chapter 4 of the graphic novel, Mamuwalde claims, "I do not kill […] I feed," when the young people confront him about his predatory feeding on Black victims. Mamuwalde's emphatic proclamation here implies that the graphic novel is cognizant how the film, through Mamuwalde, does indeed *feed* on racial stereotypes, and this feeding, like Mamuwalde's, is even worse than preying on the Black victims because it is culturally, rather than physically, destructive.

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[78] Because Mamuwalde is abject, having both white and black vampiric blood, he cannot distinguish between self and other (Dracula). This disruption of identity and unstable selfhood causes his self-destruction. According to Creed, "The place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not. The abject threatens life; it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body, and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self" (65).

Barnes's text intervenes to rectify the exploitative message underlying the *Blacula* narrative. In this updated context, the adaptation is corrective, not disruptive, and provides a bridge, through legacy, between familiar and unfamiliar. The reader is immediately alerted by the title, *Blacula: Return of the King*, that the graphic novel intends to re-textualize the *Blacula* narrative. "The King" implies that Mamuwalde is no longer the African prince of the film, situated in a nominal or secondary position; he is now, in the present tense, ascended to the rank of king. The "king" title signifies that the graphic novel re-identifies and elevates the prince in a text that is a cultural upgrade over the source film. Also, "Return" in the title implies a restoration, or the African prince-made slave is now *returned* to his proper inheritance and made king. The novel readily conveys that the text is an adaptation, a sequel to *Blacula*, but the text is not the film, and the novel's primary aim is to repair the film's problematic legacy previously established.

Blending supernatural and cultural realism, *Blacula: Return of the King* depicts Mamuwalde as he frees himself from Hell, the place he has been since his death at the movie's end. Mamuwalde's primary mission is to get revenge on Dracula by finding and killing him. Coinciding with Mamuwalde's re-appearance in contemporary Los Angeles, mysterious spray-painted graffiti tags reading "Blacula" have appeared around the Watts area, and subsequently, several Black people have gone missing, prompting a young Black blog reporter, Tina Thomas, to investigate the disappearances and the origins of the Blacula legend that continue to circulate around the Black urban neighborhoods.[79]

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[79] Although not explicit, the graphic novel implies that the blog reporter Tina Thomas is a reincarnation of the Tina character from *Blacula*, a reincarnation of Princess Luva, Mamuwalde's wife. In the graphic novel, Tina says she is from Sherman Oaks, an affluent suburban neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley, a contrast to the urbanized Watts area where the *Blacula* graphic novel and film are set. Additionally, one of the Black youths from the Watts neighborhood asks Tina, "Got to wonder what'd bring a valley girl out to the jungle in the dead of night" (Ch. 1), indicating a class distinction between Tina and the other Black youths that are featured in the adaptation.

In the novel's first panel, labeled "Chapter One," an eighteenth/nineteenth-century ship

sails over the sea directed towards the following graphic pages with frames illustrating a modern-

day urban area. Over the frames are the words "Watts, South Los Angeles," and feature an

elderly Black man, obviously homeless, holding up a cardboard sign with the singular word

"HELP" written on it (see Figure10).

Figure 10. Opening images of *Blacula: Return of the King* (Barnes, Chap. 1). See Appendix N for a copy

of the fair use document for this material.

The juxtaposition of these two pages orients the reader to the fact that the graphic novel

has moved from the historical past to the current present. In the following scenes, two police

officers drive by the homeless man and condescendingly tell him, "Move on, buddy.

Hardworking folks out here are trying to enjoy their night." The homeless man respectfully

responds, "Will do, officer." As the police officers drive off, the homeless man mumbles to

himself, "Yeah, I'm moving on to do God knows what. Made a real shitshow of your life Caesar. Start wondering what's the point of continuing on…" (Chap. 1). Out of the darkness a voice responds, "Doesn't have to be this way," and a Black female vampire steps from the shadows, reassuring the homeless man that she can remove his "benign toiling that is life," and "leave good the part," which she says is his actual death. She then attacks and brutally bites him (Ch. 1).[80] In these few opening frames, Barnes visualizes the link between the past and the present that the graphic novel establishes, not only a connection with the *Blacula* film but also with the cultural legacy that the text is about to bridge between the Blacula character of the 1970s and the reimagined contemporary Blacula that the reader is about to encounter in the upcoming pages. It is not clear if the ship depicted on the first page is the one from Stoker's novel that transported Dracula to Whitby, England, in the nineteenth century or if the ship represents the one that presumably carried Blacula to the Americas during the 1970s, or even more intriguingly if it is one of the slave ships that brought the enslaved ancestors of African Americans through the Middle Passage. However, what this panel does suggest is that the social marginalization and ultimate destruction that the Black homeless man experiences exemplify a historical connection between an inhumane racial past that is now a traumatic present filled with racism, police brutality, and cultural alienation. Barnes situates the homeless man, so the reader understands that this area is over-policed, and the police presence patronizes rather than rescues Black citizens in need. Like the *Blacula* film, the graphic novel interprets these societal problems through vampirism. This convenient metaphor appropriately articulates a legacy of horror and abjection inherent in the trauma African Americans have suffered.

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[80] Later, the comic reveals that this female vampire is the character Kross's grandmother, a reimagining of the female cab driver, one of Mamuwalde's victims from the *Blacula* film.

As previously examined in this project, literary adaptations, like *Blacula: Return of the King*, can be abject because they vacillate between the past and present. However, while adaptation can be a disruptive force, straddling between then and now, the concept of legacy and heritage remediates the adaptation from the abject. This renewal can restore order to the system and bridge the gap between old and new, familiar, and unknown. Rather than presenting a process of destabilization, legacy provides a process of continuity. In the case of a memory fraught with trauma and mental wounding, such as that caused by acts of slavery, adaptations can interrupt that painful echo from the past, purify it through revision in the present, and preserve it as heritage for the future, thereby renewing the source material into new artistic expression.[81] *Blacula: Return of the King* is a direct response to *Blacula* but also a part of the cultural legacy of the Black vampire and its connection to slavery. The graphic novel attempts to retell the slave narrative as a contemporary tale. This *pseudo*-neo-slave narrative speaks to the modern destruction of Black society through systematic discrimination that reduces many Black communities to a state of urban decay. Viewed in this light, *Blacula* is concerned with race-based oppression since it uses slavery as its point of departure, but *Blacula: Return of the King* is more preoccupied with neo-slavery and the state of the Black urban experience existing in the now. Like the film, the graphic novel revisits the past to situate Mamuwalde's (slave) narrative. In the graphic novel, Mamuwalde retells his story, starting with his travels in 1780 with his wife Luva from their native Nigeria to Transylvania and Dracula's castle, where Mamuwalde is subsequently turned into a vampire by the Count. In the panels that unfold Mamuwalde's past, the graphic novel presents illustrations that mirror images from the film's beginning that establish Mamuwalde's quest for Black liberation and his enslavement by Dracula. However,

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[81] According to Kristeva, art is the "catharsis par excellence" that releases repressed emotions caused by abjection (*Desire* 138).

while the film locates this scene at the beginning of the narrative, the graphic novel situates this part of Mamuwalde's story between two contemporary scenes of Tina searching for Blacula and Kross relaying his own narrative about losing his family to vampirism. Notable here is that the graphic novel locates Mamuwalde's story between those of two young contemporary Black people, demonstrating how these stories, as legacies of trauma, are passed down from one generation to the next.

The graphic novel portrays one particular plotline concerning the vampiric contagion that has spread throughout the neighborhood and its impact on the young Black boys who have lost family members to vampirism. Building directly on a plot point initially established in the *Blacula* film, Barnes presents one such story modeled after the female cab driver victim Mamuwalde attacks and turns into a vampire in the *Blacula* film. In one of the film's most dramatic scenes, the cab driver resurrects in the city morgue and attacks an attendant. In the graphic novel, the cab driver's young grandson Kelvin, nicknamed Kross because of the Christian iconography he wears to ward off neighborhood vampires, has a personal vendetta against Mamuwalde, who Kross says, "Did my granny wrong […] and my peoples been messed up ever since […]" (Chap. 1). Vampirism destroys Kross's family, and now he plays surrogate father to other young Black children who have "lost people too" to vampirism (Chap. 1). When Kross, his young crew, and Tina visit a cemetery to try to track down Mamuwalde, the group encounters Kross's "undead" grandparents, who he insists are still "my people" when he tries to stop Tina from driving a stake through the vampires' hearts to release them from the curse (Chap. 1). Kross's grandmother, as a conniving vampire, easily manipulates the young man's vulnerability, telling him that "I'll take all your pain away, Kelvin" (Chap. 1). Calling Kross by his real name, "Kelvin" as a manipulative tool, his grandmother, now a vampire, plays on his

need for a family, a need that vampirism, initiated by Dracula and further spread by Mamuwalde, has deprived Kross of. Kross admits he is "tired of being alone in the world," which demonstrates how his family's enslavement in vampirism has deprived him of much-needed familial love (Chap. 1). After a confrontation with his grandparents, an emotional Kross must be convinced by Tina and the other young boys that his grandparents are now under the control of vampirism, making him finally realize that his real family is gone.

The graphic novel then presents another young Black boy's story to again illustrate the negative impact that vampirism has had on the urban L.A. neighborhood. Bop is now an orphan after his police officer father was killed in the line of duty, an intriguing inversion of the police brutality trope. Soon after, vampires brutally attack and transform Bop's mother and sister. Bop is then sent to a foster home where his mother and sister, now vampires, come to his bedroom window every night, trying to feed on him. Like Kross's grandparents, Bop's mother and sister try to manipulate his vulnerability as a lonely inner-city boy. Eventually, Kross and his crew "adopt" Bop. The crew, made up of young Black boys who have lost family members to vampirism, live in abandoned houses around the city. Bop admits that Kross and his crew are the "next best thing to my real family" (Chap. 3).

The stories of Kross and Bop and their interactions with their family members, now turned into vampires, symbolize the problem many Black children face growing up in America's inner cities, either in single-parent or foster homes with a limited connection to their families, demonstrated in the film and novel as another of slavery's damaging legacies. Slavery fostered a connection to social disenfranchisement that made some Black communities a hotbed of poverty

and violence.[82] As a part of this legacy, many Black families were negatively impacted, often leaving children to fend for themselves. Mobilizing the vampire as a symbol of slavery, *Blacula* engages with the literal and metaphorical heritage of Black enslavement while also considering slavery's broader political and social legacy as it was manifested in the culture and politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s.[83] *Blacula* and *Blacula: Return of the King* both thematically respond to this legacy of slavery and its perpetuation of continuing societal concerns associated with structural racism that attributes to inescapable poverty. These conditions are what *Blacula* and *Blacula: Return of the King* are responding to, and the Black vampire at the center of both narratives symbolizes this phenomenon as he perpetuates a cycle of dependency in the form of a bloodlust that will not allow him any means to escape his condition.

Blacula is not just about slavery but about slavery's legacy, making vampirism a powerful symbol of this legacy. Mamuwalde's vampiric feeding on his people is rectified in *Blacula: Return of the King*, which blames Black-on-Black crime on white institutions. Like the film, the graphic novel stages a confrontation between Mamuwalde and white police officers,

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[82] Scholars argue that slavery and the legacy of structural racism inherent in commodifying Black individuals remain the root cause of poverty and violence prevalent in low-income urban areas in the United States. According to Leonard Egede: "There is emerging evidence that structural racism is a major contributor to poor health outcomes for ethnic minorities. Structural racism captures upstream historic racist events (such as slavery, black code, and Jim Crow laws) and more recent state-sanctioned racist laws in the form of redlining" (1534). In investigating the relationship between slavery, structural racism, and poverty, Regina Baker and Heather O'Connell maintain, "As a proxy for the contemporary structural racism associated with the legacy of slavery, studies have examined the historical concentration of enslaved persons—the percent of the total population enslaved in 1860—in connection with contemporary outcomes. For instance, scholars have demonstrated the persistence of slavery's racist legacy in Black–White inequalities in poverty, economic mobility, and White socioeconomic gains" (1343). Speaking on the systematic oppression of African Americans in the United States, Manning Marable states, "From the vantage point of people of color, and especially Americans of African descent, or collective histories and experiences of interaction with the white majority have been largely defined around a series of oppressive institutions and practices […] Although laws have changed regarding the treatment of racialized minorities over the years, the deep structure of white prejudice, power, and privilege has formed the undemocratic foundation of human interactions has not been fundamentally altered" (6).

[83] In the controversial *Moynihan Report* (1965), Daniel Patrick Moynihan encapsulates the social effects of slavery on African Americans, stating: "The most difficult fact for white Americans to understand is that in these terms the circumstances of the Negro American community in recent years has probably been getting worse, not better […] The gap between the Negro and most other groups in American society is widening" (1).

again suggesting the unfair brutality often perpetrated by police officers against African Americans. In the graphic novel, however, the scene unfolds differently since Mamuwalde's actions are more animalistic than in the film. Here, he does not just bite the white police officers; he viciously rips out the white men's throats (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Mamuwalde viciously attacks white police officers. (Barnes, Chap. 3). See Appendix O for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

This event is notable since Barnes again inverts the dynamic between the white police officers and Mamuwalde, an unarmed Black man targeted by the police. In a flashback scene, Mamuwalde remembers the "young warriors burning with passion of youth" from his tribe in

Africa whom he guided through the rite of passage ceremonies (Chap. 3). Barnes draws contrasts between the African youth receiving paternal guidance, versus the young African Americans orphaned by vampirism, and who now lack paternal support (see Figure 12).
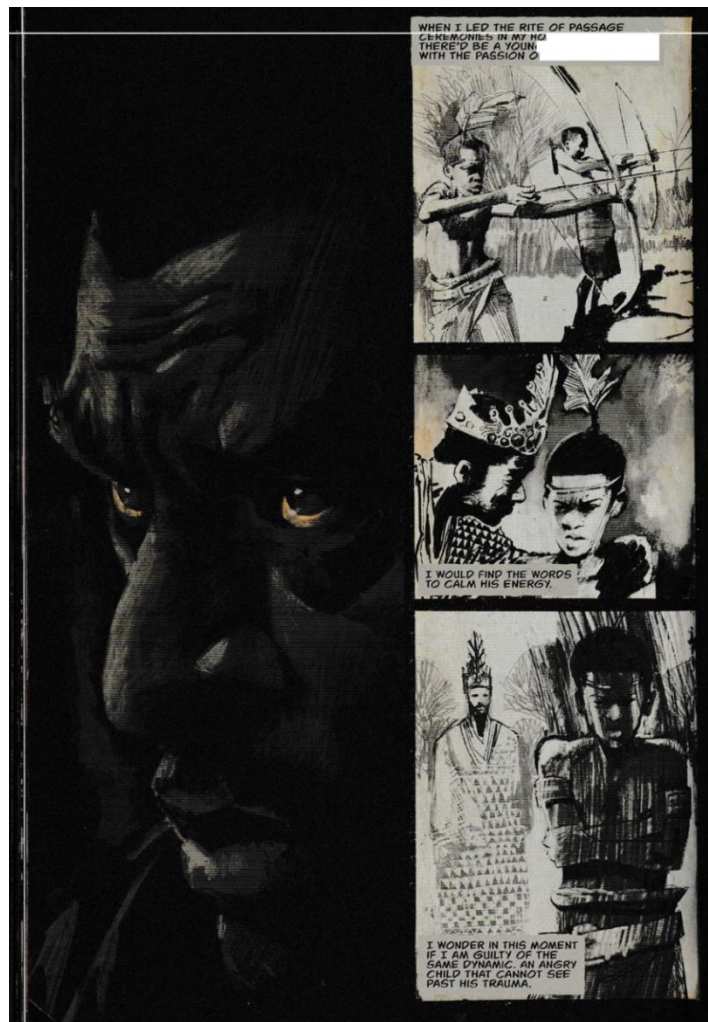
Figure 12. Mamuwalde remembers the young warriors from his African tribe. (Barnes, Chap. 3). See Appendix P for a copy of the fair use document for this material.

Ironically, Mamuwalde compares himself to these African youths who have supportive elders to help them positively redirected their passion. At this point, Mamuwalde questions his obsessive quest for revenge against Dracula and further questions how these motivations hurt

him and his people, admitting his regret for feeding on his people: "It is the blood of those who share my heritage. Those I sought to save so very long ago" (Chap. 3).The film version of *Blacula* never allows Mamuwalde to verbalize the consequences associated with his actions and how his quest for revenge affects others, particularly his Black victims. However, Barnes reimagines Mamuwalde as more sympathetic to the needs of the African Americans enslaved by vampirism and the dire socio-economic conditions in which they live. In this instance, the graphic novel presents Mamuwalde as more introspective than his character is in the film.

Another important scene in the graphic novel is when Kross, Tina, and Kross's crew confront Mamuwalde about his preying on the Black victims in the neighborhood. Mamuwalde tells boys, "You know nothing of my story […] what was done to me (Chap. 4). This vital point of the narrative specifically bridges the legacy of slavery that *Blacula* symbolizes with the new generation he is attempting to "school" with his racial history, which is their history as well. Mamuwalde also explains to the young group that he is not to blame for their people's destruction; it is Dracula, a symbol of white institutional racism, responsible for the damage in their neighborhood.

When Kross finally confronts Mamuwalde about killing his family, Mamuwalde offers a surprising rationalization for his actions: "I do not kill, boy. I feed" (Chap. 4). Kross tells Mamuwalde that his acts of vampirism have: "Turned the hood upside down […] made your own kind monsters…" (Chap. 4). Here, the text suggests that Mamuwalde – and *Blacula* itself – failed to consider the broader social impact and legacy that they would have on Black culture. Blacula fed on–and fed– harmful Black stereotypes. However, *Blacula: Return of the King* reveals this, and as a corrective apparatus, the graphic novel seeks to reverse the cultural damage left unresolved in the film. Mamuwalde responds: "When I was human, I yearned for the

liberation of our people […] but I am no longer a man" (Chap. 4). Barnes characterizes

Mamuwalde as not human to explain why he feeds on his people; the implication being that

Mamuwalde has no choice since he is bound by the vampiric enslavement inflicted upon him by

Dracula. This is the excuse Mamuwalde uses to absolve himself from preying on other Black

people. Barnes is aware of this paradox since Kross responds to Mamuwalde, "Wasn't no

Dracula did my Nana […] it was him [Mamuwalde]" (Chap. 4). Mamuwalde replies: "I owe you

no explanation […] what was done to me is in the tradition of all the horrors our people have

endured" (Chap. 4). In an attempt to absolve himself of responsibility for his treatment of his

people, Mamuwalde's statement here presumably refers to a legacy of enslavement, Jim Crow

segregation, institutional racism, and other social problems that signify forms of neo-slavery

within African communities.

With this scene, Barnes again subverts the *Blacula* narrative, absolving Mamuwalde of

the wrongs he has committed and transfers the accountability back to Dracula. Through

Mamuwalde, Barnes gives voice to the suffering and degradation that African Americans have

suffered in the past and continue to suffer in the present constructed upon racist institutions.

Nevertheless, while the graphic novel depicts Mamuwalde as a predator, it also allows him to

reconcile his own predacious nature that has compelled him to victimize his people. At the same

time, Mamuwalde recognizes that African Americans are not only manifestations of slavery but

are also symbols of unresolved trauma born out of persistent racism. To that point, the narrative

moves past slavery to a new moment, a site of renewal and reconciliation, where Mamuwalde

and the young people represent the passing of cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

After Mamuwalde explains Dracula's role in perpetrating Black victimization, Tina compels

Kross to "look around…our world didn't just get the way it did" (Chap. 4), implying that the

urban decay in and around their neighborhood is the result of a methodical plan by the white system to keep African Americans oppressed. Tina's quick acquiescence and willingness to help Mamuwalde root out and defeat Dracula, who Tina finally realizes is the real threat to the Black neighborhood, demonstrates an instance of Black solidarity, a collective call for African Americans to not only to challenge subjugation but to also demand liberation. Mamuwalde tells the group that he decided to "free" himself from Hell because "it has dawned on me that seeking another's permission to be free is a fool's errand…freedom is my right…so is revenge" (Chap. 1). Here, Mamuwalde's invocation of personal agency illustrates Hudson's point that "vampires of color […] reclaim agency and property, including stolen labor and lands visualized in terms of Count Dracula's 'earth-boxes' […]" (139). Mamuwalde is now transformed into a social advocate for young African Americans. Instead of preying upon them, he is guiding young people, inspiring them to "free" themselves and resist white oppression, like he supported young African boys in his native land.

Much like *Blacula* portrays the Dracula character, Barnes characterizes Dracula and his two white henchmen in the graphic novel as exemplars of white supremacy and bigotry. For emphasis, one of Dracula's henchmen even wears a Confederate flag t-shirt and lives in a dilapidated trailer, implying a disparate class distinction rooted in prejudice and ignorance. As a group in allegiance with Mamuwalde to defeat Dracula, the kids go to the trailer where the Count has been hiding for the showdown. With this depiction, Barnes inverts both class and racial structures from the past, so instead of the traditional white mob invading Black areas to lynch/kill Black men, the graphic novel depicts a *Black* mob, a Black group of the new generation, coming to destroy the white man responsible for Black suffering. Like the film's warehouse confrontation, where Blacula deploys his Black vampires to combat the police, in the

graphic novel, Dracula uses his own mob of zombified vampires to help defeat Mamuwalde. This scene provides a potent symbol of how white institutions in the U.S. conspire to disenfranchise African Americans. The Black mob is finally getting revenge on the white establishment as Barnes reinvents the contemporary narrative to reflect a revised story about race and class.

The end of the *Blacula* film depicts total Black destruction, with Mamuwalde killing himself, but the graphic novel retains the Blacula figure to inspire a new generation into action, a young Black generation moving towards restoration. The text implies that there is still more corrective action that needs to happen in the Black community since in this case, the kid's parents are still dead, and their families are still destroyed. As such, Barnes indicates with the story's plot that while there has been a start at social reconciliation, more must be done to make Black communities and families whole. The text ends on a note that suggests that although there is work ahead, the Black community has hope for the rectified family, repaired legacy, and reconciled heritage, which is a good place to begin.

Scholarly Contributions

Vampirism provides a unique link to slavery since the oppression and marginalization experienced by African Americans never seem to die. Black culture was about slavery in the past, and it is still about slavery now in the form of contemporary social issues. Rethinking the idea of families, heritage, and legacy, the film *Blacula* and the graphic novel *Blacula: Return of the King* continue adaptation in differently, drawing power from the audience's memory of the novel *Dracula*. The vampire is considered a figure for adaptation to articulate social problems or for the Black vampire to speak to a legacy of slavery and institutional and systematic racism. In a historical context, society has not remedied its problems, so adapted texts, like *Blacula: Return*

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of the King, choose to remediate by deconstructing and reconstructing the source texts. Therefore, themes like legacy, tradition, and the handing down of cultural inheritance are at the heart of the original novel and its adaptation. These themes are tied to vampirism because they reflect an eternal bloodline continuously passed down from generation to generation. The idea of Black vampirism is a metaphor for the history of slavery that is still undead and continues to impact African Americans into the present.

CONCLUSION:

(RE)ENVISIONING A LOST LEGACY

Increasingly, neo-Victorian films and textual adaptations reimagine nineteenth-century fiction include diverse characterizations, particularly Black representations, to make visible a Black presence previously silenced in the original texts. This pattern in contemporary neo-Victorianism reflects an awareness of the existence of Black bodies, viewpoints, and experiences in the nineteenth century. In embracing a more inclusive storytelling paradigm, filmmakers, writers, and artists highlight and comment on the sociopolitical and cultural conditions of people of color. These contemporary adaptations are recovering diverse voices to visualize a Black presence in period media, reclaiming a long-ignored collective cultural legacy.

This dissertation responds to these current trends in revisionist adaptations of nineteenth-century fiction. My aim in analyzing contemporary neo-Victorian adaptations is to show how modern novels, films, and television series represent Blackness within a Victorian fictional landscape. My investigation of neo-Victorian revisionists' efforts to integrate Blackness, often absent from nineteenth-century texts, is guided by questions of memory and restitution, literary revision, and imagining an alternative past. This exploration of contemporary retellings of classic Victorian literature positions the Black body within conventional narratives to reclaim a lost culture and recover disregarded (or discarded) perspectives. The findings of this project hold significant value for current conversations within various related fields of study.

The common thread that runs through the chapters presented here is the concept of legacy and the numerous ways it manifests the enduring impact that historical memory has on the future. These chapters reflect the different approaches to understanding textual heritage and the influence one text can inherit from another. For instance, Chapter 1 illustrates how the text as culture-text passes on a literary legacy recrafted through various (re)incarnations of the original source. Although these adaptations often begin with slavery in the context of Black oppression, they do not necessarily end there, as they attempt to reclaim Black agency; therefore, in Chapter 4, we see the interruption of slavery's oppressive legacy as Black cultural heritage is redefined for a new generation through Black resistance and liberation. Fundamentally, these adaptations represent an adaptive legacy that inspires a constant evolution of the source text from one incarnation to another, giving modern revisionists a convenient tool that allows the Victorian to speak to contemporary audiences.

The contemporary adaptations examined in this investigation present a corrective look forward as they endeavor to revise or displace the existing literary legacies so that nineteenth-century culture-texts can speak to particular contemporary moments. In this context, adaptations function as tools for criticism: their critique of established texts is rooted in their historical moment, and they are critical of how contemporary audiences engage with and reimagine the nineteenth century. The adaptations investigated in this dissertation speak specifically to a current moment that seeks to include more racially diverse voices within contemporary cultural media. While engaging with original nineteenth-century texts, these adaptations participate in a re-calibration of sociopolitical aspects of race not previously approached in classic literature. Due to race-based slavery and systematic racial disenfranchisement throughout the nineteenth century, the Black perspective is frequently overlooked within the source texts. Contemporary

filmmakers and authors have noted this conspicuous absence and have reimagined and adapted the Victorian by visualizing Black bodies within nineteenth-century spaces.

To articulate revised cultural and racial legacies—legacies previously absent in the source text—these adaptations have either completely altered the text (as in Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*, discussed in Chapter 1; or Rodney Barnes's *Blacula: Return of the King*, discussed in Chapter 4) or left the original text intact while adding another layer of adjoining cultural artifacts to reflect contemporary times (as in the BBC's *Oliver Twist* [2007] and FX's *Great Expectations* [2023], discussed in Chapter 3). As discussed in Chapter 2, in her 2011 film adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights,* director Andrea Arnold gives audiences a reimagined version of Heathcliff as a Black runaway slave. In doing this, Arnold wants the audience to rethink Brontë's story and the character of Heathcliff this time from Heathcliff's perspective, as the audience witnesses the violent events that unfold in the film around him. This perspective shows the Black body scarred with signs of physical abuse. The visualization of the traumatized Black body, implying slave abuse, makes the audience more sympathetic to Heathcliff's condition as a Black boy mentally and physically abused by a white society that others and marginalizes him because of his race. Graphic visualizations often put the Black bodies at the forefront of the adaptation to remind audiences how society has purposely obscured these bodies in the past. Therefore, they are prominently featured to underscore a message that speaks to modernity and racial inclusivity.

Each adaptation examined in this dissertation contributes to a critical and corrective legacy that attempts to rectify problematic aspects of the source texts. For this reason, the project opened with an analysis of LaValle's graphic novel *Destroyer*, which adds to Mary Shelley's Frankensteinian culture-text to give audiences a revised version of Shelley's Creature embodied as a Black boy. This project then bookends its investigations with *Blacula: Return of the King*,

another graphic novel that attempts to offer solutions for contemporary racism using a different culture-text, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Although different, these two graphic novels approach intricately connected issues concerning the adaptive process and its signification of a cultural legacy rectified by reframing their source texts through envisioning Black bodies. In these instances, the adaptations allow Victorian texts to better speak to contemporary audiences who desire a more diverse fictional landscape within cinema and literature.

Notably, each adaptation analyzed in this project demonstrates some level of corrective intervention in the cultural legacy of its traditional text. As products of their cultural moments, contemporary adaptations represent historically located revisions reflecting contemporary social issues concerning class, race, and gender. The legacies they reimagine are specific to their imagined audiences; thus, the Black body they visualize reflects and comments on current issues concerning race and racism. In *Destroyer*, for example, LaValle unmakes Shelley's 1818 Creature character and remakes him in Akai, a Black body, to speak to prevailing cultural concerns about racial profiling and police assaults on Black bodies collectively. Similarly, with his graphic novel *Blacula*: *Return of the King*, Rodney Barnes reconfigures the Blacula character from a metaphor for Black exploitation to a figure who reclaims and repositions the Black body to represent Black agency and liberation in the twenty-first century.

The adaptive legacy these adaptations attach to the former culture-text is unique to each chapter, and this variance gives these modern adaptations their value. The adaptations analyzed in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 demonstrate how an effective adaptive process functions as a critical corrective instrument to rectify Victorian literature's lack of racial perspective. However, the television series in Chapter 3 illustrate how some modern adaptations are less restorative when they implement color-blind casting that puts Black actors on screen without exploring their

interiority. For example, televisual adaptations of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (2007) and *Great Expectations* (2023) cast Black actors as Nancy and Estella, respectively. However, rather than providing a space for the Black body to convey the Black experience, the color-blind casting ignores the social implications of Black people living in a white social order during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because the color-blind casting used in these series provides no depth or cultural reality to the racial experience, the *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* adaptations I discuss in Chapter 3 pass on a problematic legacy that effectively, if ironically, erases a historical Black experience. The Black perspective promised by casting women of color is ignored within the films, and the disconnecting of Black bodies from Black interiorities is no improvement over the absence of Black presence in the source novels.

The challenge that adaptations like *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* face lies in the nature of adaptation's complex processes. On the one hand, the audience feels a nostalgic desire for the original text, a narrative with which they are familiar. However, the audience also desires innovation and novelty: they want to see the text they know in a fresh and stimulating way. This contradiction creates tension within the act of adapting media. Adaptations create a dilemma for an audience wanting fidelity to the original work and wanting originality. Adaptation, therefore, lies somewhere between what we covet as recognizable and memorable and what we reject as wholly unknown. It is this uneasiness, this tension, inherent in an adaptation that gives weight to the racialization performed in these updated texts because the Black body and its disruptive presence within white-dominated structures are often interpreted in terms of simultaneous desire and aversion. Therefore, the audience sees the same rejection/desire paradigm within these Black characters cast in traditionally white roles in modern adaptations.

This project's discoveries call for reconsidering racial representation in contemporary adaptations that visualize the Black body and present the Black point of view within the adapted narrative. Without discouraging the creative processes when reimaging adaptation, filmmakers and authors can (and arguably should) be aware of the inherent issues associated with adapting nineteenth-century novels, mainly when period adaptations include people of color. When measured in terms of tension and instability, the adaptation process also invites a new level of contemplation that accounts for the adaptation's contradictions. Therefore, theoretical approaches to adaptation should consider its paradoxical nature to preserve the source text's legacy while also satisfying the needs of modern audiences seeking current connections to the past.

This project focused on Black characters in contemporary film or novel adaptations of nineteenth-century texts. I hope it provides theoretical and critical grounding for future work on how other racial identities visualized in film and textual adaptations of nineteenth-century literature. Such a study might consider, for example, the critically acclaimed novel *The Daughter of Dr. Moreau* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia, which reimagines H.G. Wells's novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Moreno-Garcia's novel builds on Wells's story from the perspective of young Carlota Moreau, the infamous doctor's young Mexican daughter, now the story's narrator, replacing Wells's Edward Prendick. Carlota tells her own story, and by thus shifting and extending the novel's point of view, Moreno-Garcia allows the racialized body to speak in a manner that Well's original novel suppressed. The adaptive retellings of canonical Victorian texts reflect a more inclusive cultural modernity and, therefore, embrace alternative perspectives, whether racial, gendered, or otherwise disregarded by the traditional canon. Analyzing Garcia's

novel as representative of a Mexican female perspective furthers our understanding of how modern adaptations can recast culture-texts to reflect diverse experiences.

My research can also be useful for future studies from a pedagogical perspective that educators can explore for potential research. Future directions for investigation could lead to a curriculum of study centered on the pairings of canonical novels with their corresponding contemporary visual adaptations in film and graphic narratives featuring Black bodies moving within Victorian culture. The objective would be to acquaint modern students with the textual focus that compares both periods' nineteenth- and twenty-first-century socio-political concerns, particularly concerning race, racism, and racial identity. This research would be valuable in the classroom as students "read" and analyze contemporary visual materials that link to Victorian novels, allowing them to understand how the adaptations reimagine the source texts and the significance of these revisions. For example, an effective method of teaching Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which can sometimes be challenging for first-year college students, is to use LaValle's adapted graphic novel *Destroyer* as an ideal pre/post visual companion piece to promote student comprehension of the novel. A professor can also use *Destroyer* to highlight the adaptive process that uses familiar texts to call attention to contemporary issues similar to Shelley's, making these adaptations valuable course resources. More specifically, Black students can imagine themselves in these texts of the past through the Black characters embodied in modern adaptations, with the added benefit that students of color can see themselves represented in Victoriana, promoting a stronger sense of racial identity and self-image. On an even deeper level, these adaptations also demonstrate to students that nineteenth-century texts are not just about the nineteenth century, as these modern adaptations based on a past era speak to current readers. I envision educators using this curriculum plan much like I do in my literature courses,

where I frequently combine visual media with corresponding textual readings to encourage students to connect classic literature and current popular culture.

The issue of Black representation in neo-Victorian adaptations has not received sufficient scrutiny in current academia. This has to change as modern filmmakers and writers produce more period dramas with Black characters. The study of race and Black representation in neo-Victorian media is an important topic that deserves examination and should be included in the literary debate surrounding neo-Victorianism despite the narrow scope of current research. My contribution to the field demonstrates how twentieth and twenty-first centuries writers and filmmakers can fail to depict the Black body, with the result being that they disregard or distort the very Blackness that they seek to honor, respect, and restore to the nineteenth century's literary and cultural heritage. By drawing attention to current gaps in the fields of Black studies, neo-Victorianism, and adaptation, this dissertation will, I hope, challenge the reader to think critically about the problems with Black representation—or rather, the absence of it—in contemporary neo-Victorian literature.

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APPENDIX A:

FRANKENSTEIN'S CREATURE CHARACTER DESIGNATION

Creature Designation	Description
"Shelley's 1818 Creature"	The intelligent, philosophical, and compassionate Creature depicted in Mary Shelley's first published edition of *Frankenstein,* 1818. Modern critics agree that this is the depiction of Frankenstein's Creature that Shelley intended based on notes from the novel's draft. (See Chris Baldick, 1987; Anne Mellor, 1988; Fred Botting, 1991; and Jacqueline Foertsch, 2001).
"Culture-monster"	The portrayal of Frankenstein's Creature as a mute, mindless, monster, influenced by the 1931 film *Frankenstein,* and commonly depicted in modern popular culture. *"*The Monster," as the Creature is billed in the film, is portrayed by actor Boris Karloff with iconic special effects make-up created by make-up artist Jack Pierce.
"The Destroyer monster"	An exaggerated representation of Frankenstein's Creature as a mute killing machine that appears in Victor LaValle's graphic novel *Destroyer,* 2020. More reminiscent of the "culture-monster" (see above) from the 1931 *Frankenstein* film rather than the depiction of the Creature from Shelley's 1818 novel.
"Akai-Creature"	From Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*, 2020. Created after Akai is killed by police and then brought back from the dead with nanotechnology by his scientist mother, Dr. Josephine Baker. The "Akai-Creature" is a human/cyborg hybrid with a persona like Frankenstein's Creature from the 1818 text.

FRANKENSTEIN EARLY-STAGE AND FILM ADAPTATION CHRONOLOGY

Year	Play Title	Producer
1823	*Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*	Richard Brinsley Peake
1826	*Frankenstein; or The Man and the Monster* *The Monster and the Magician*	Henry Milner Antony Beraud/ Jean Merle
Year	Film Title	Director
1910	*Frankenstein*	J. Searle Dawley
1915	*Life Without Soul*	Joseph Smiley
1920	*The Monster of Frankenstein*	Eugenio Testa
1931	*Frankenstein*	James Whale

APPENDIX C:

FRANKENSTEIN BY MARY SHELLEY PUBLICATION HISTORY

Year	Publication Notes
1818	First publication. Published anonymously on January 1st in London by Lackington, Hughes, Hardin, Mavor, & Jones. Three volumes. Preface written by Percy Shelley. Dedicated to William Godwin. Five hundred copies printed. Overall, the story is more sympathetic to Victor. Most modern scholars view this first edition as more groundbreaking. Valued as an unaltered version of what Mary Shelley intended the story to be.
1821	Translated into French as *Frankenstein: ou le Prométhée Moderne*, by Jules Saladin
1823	Second publication. Lists Mary Shelley on novel's title page. Published on August 11th by G. & W. B. Whittaker in two volumes due to the popularity of Richard Brinsley Peake's stage play adaptation *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*.
1831	Third publication on October 31st by Colburn & Bentley in one volume. Most heavily revised edition. Less radical to comply with Victorian standards. Remains the most popular version. Includes Mary Shelley's preface relaying her "waking dream" as the story's genesis, changes Elizabeth's background history, includes references to galvanism, clarifies Victor's motives for his creation, highlights Victor's hubris, and removes *Paradise Lost* epigraph.

APPENDIX D:

WUTHERING HEIGHTS CINEMA AND TELEVISION ADAPTATION CHRONOLOGY

Cinema Adaptations			
Year	**Film Title**	**Director**	**Nationality**
1920	*Wuthering Heights*	A.V. Bramble	United Kingdom
1939	*Wuthering Heights*	William Wyler	United States
1954	*Abismos de Pasion*	Luis Bunuel	Mexico
1950	*Arzoo*	Shaheed Latif	Indian
1951	*Hulchul*	S.K. Ojha	Indian
1966	*Dil Diya Dard Liya*	Abdur Rashid Kardar Dilip Kumar	Indian
1970	*Wuthering Heights*	Robert Fuest	United States
1985	*Hurlevent*	Jacques Rivette	France
1988	*Onimaru*	Yoshishige Yoshida	Japan
1991	*Hihintayin Kita sa Langit*	Carlos Sigiuon-Reyna	Philippines
1992	*Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*	Peter Kosminsky	United States
2007	*The Promise*	Mike Tuviera	Philippines
2011	*Wuthering Heights*	Andrea Arnold	United Kingdom
Television Films			
Year	**Film**	**Director**	**Nationality**
1948	*Wuthering Heights*	George O'Ferrall	United Kingdom
1950	*Wuthering Heights*	Charlton Heston	United States
1953	*Wuthering Heights*	Rudolph Cartier	United Kingdom
1959	*Wuthering Heights*	Alan Burke	Australia
1962	*Wuthering Heights*	Rudolph Cartier	United Kingdom
1967	*Wuthering Heights*	Peter Sasdy	United Kingdom
1978	*Wuthering Heights*	Peter Hammond	United Kingdom
1998	*Wuthering Heights*	David Skynner	United Kingdom
2002	*Sparkhouse*	Robin Shepperd	United Kingdom
2003	*Wuthering Heights*	Suri Krishnamma	United States
2004	*Cime Tempestose*	Fabrizio Costa	Italian
2009	*Wuthering Heights*	Coky Giedroykc	United Kingdom
2015	*Wuthering High School*	Anthony DiBlasi	United States

APPENDIX E:

USF FAIR USE FORM

PHOTOGRAPH OF *BLACK VICTORIANS* BY CARYS UNDERWOOD. JULY 25, 2021

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: Urshela Wiggins McKinney   Date: 3/27/2924

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"

Title of Copyrighted Work: Photograph of *Black Victorians* by Carys Underwood. July 25, 2021

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Educational	☐ Commercial
☐ Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use)	☐ Entertainment
☐ Research or Scholarship	☐ Bad-faith behavior
☐ Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment	☐ Denying credit to original author
☐ Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work)	☐ Non-transformative or exact copy
☐ Restricted Access (to students or other appropriate group)	☐ Made accessible on Web or to public
☐ Nonprofit	☐ Profit-generating use

Overall, the purpose and character of your use ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

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NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Factual or nonfiction ☐ Important to favored educational objectives ☐ Published work	☐ Creative or fiction ☐ Consumable (workbooks, tests) ☐ Unpublished

Overall, the nature of the copyrighted material ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALITY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Small amount (using only the amount necessary to accomplish the purpose) ☐ Amount is important to favored socially beneficial objective (i.e. educational objectives) ☐ Lower quality from original (ex. Lower resolution or bitrate photos, video, and audio)	☐ Large portion or whole work ☐ Portion used is qualitatively substantial (i.e. it is the 'heart of the work') ☐ Similar or exact quality of original work

Overall, the amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ No significant effect on the market or potential market for the original ☐ No similar product marketed by the copyright holder ☐ You own a lawfully acquired copy of the material ☐ The copyright holder is unidentifiable ☐ Lack of licensing mechanism for the material	☐ Replaces sale of copyrighted work ☐ Significantly impairs market or potential market for the work ☐ Numerous copies or repeated, long-term use ☐ Made accessible on Web or to public ☐ Affordable and reasonably available permissions or licensing

Overall, the effect on the market for the original ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

CONCLUSION

The combined purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted material, amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole and the effect on the market for the original ☐ **likely supports fair use** or ☐ **likely does not support fair use.**

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from:
          https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20a ny%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

USF FAIR USE FORM

***DESTROYER* (2020) BY VICTOR LAVALLE - OPENING IMAGE OF THE**

DESTROYER MONSTER SITTING ON A POLAR ICE CAP IN THE ARCTIC

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: ___Urshela Wiggins McKinney_____   Date:_____3/27/2924_____

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"_____

Title of Copyrighted Work: *Destroyer* (2020) by Victor LaValle - Opening image of the Destroyer monster sitting on a polar ice cap in the arctic_____

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
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☐ Research or Scholarship	☐ Bad-faith behavior
☐ Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment	☐ Denying credit to original author
☐ Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work)	☐ Non-transformative or exact copy
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Overall, the effect on the market for the original ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

CONCLUSION

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from:
        https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

APPENDIX G:

USF FAIR USE FORM

DESTROYER (2020) BY VICTOR LAVALLE - A PANEL DEPICTING THE

DESTROYER MONSTER RIPPING OUT A CREW MEMBER'S HEART

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: Urshela Wiggins McKinney   Date: 3/27/2924

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"

Title of Copyrighted Work: *Destroyer* (2020) by Victor LaValle - A panel depicting the Destroyer monster attacking a whaling ship crew member, ripping out the man's heart

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Educational ☐ Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use) ☐ Research or Scholarship ☐ Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment ☐ Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work) ☐ Restricted Access (to students or other appropriate group) ☐ Nonprofit	☐ Commercial ☐ Entertainment ☐ Bad-faith behavior ☐ Denying credit to original author ☐ Non-transformative or exact copy ☐ Made accessible on Web or to public ☐ Profit-generating use

Overall, the purpose and character of your use ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Factual or nonfiction ☐ Important to favored educational objectives ☐ Published work	☐ Creative or fiction ☐ Consumable (workbooks, tests) ☐ Unpublished

Overall, the nature of the copyrighted material ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALITY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

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EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

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CONCLUSION

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        https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

APPENDIX H:

USF FAIR USE FORM

***DESTROYER* (2020) BY VICTOR LAVALLE -THE DESTROYER MONSTER PUSHES**

THE BOARDER WALL DOWN ON IMMIGRANTS

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: ___Urshela Wiggins McKinney_____   Date:_____3/27/2924_____

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"_____

Title of Copyrighted Work: *Destroyer* (2020) by Victor LaValle – A panel depicting the Destroyer monster pushing down the boarder wall down on immigrants_____

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
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☐ Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use)	☐ Entertainment
☐ Research or Scholarship	☐ Bad-faith behavior
☐ Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment	☐ Denying credit to original author
☐ Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work)	☐ Non-transformative or exact copy
☐ Restricted Access (to students or other appropriate group)	☐ Made accessible on Web or to public
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Overall, the purpose and character of your use ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Factual or nonfiction ☐ Important to favored educational objectives ☐ Published work	☐ Creative or fiction ☐ Consumable (workbooks, tests) ☐ Unpublished

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AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALITY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

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EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

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        https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

USF FAIR USE FORM

DESTROYER **(2020) BY VICTOR LAVALLE -THE AKAI-CREATURE PEACEFULLY**

ENJOYING A BASEBALL GAME AT THE END OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: Urshela Wiggins McKinney   Date: 3/27/2924

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"

Title of Copyrighted Work: *Destroyer* (2020) by Victor LaValle – The Akai-creature peacefully enjoying a baseball game at the end of the graphic novel

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

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NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
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Overall, the nature of the copyrighted material ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALITY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

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EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

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CONCLUSION

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from:
        https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20a ny%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

USF FAIR USE FORM

***DESTROYER* (2020) BY VICTOR LA VALLE - THE AKAI-CREATURE'S PIECED**

TOGETHER BODY REMINISCENT OF THE CULTURE-TEXT ICONOGRAPHY

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: ___Urshela Wiggins McKinney_____   Date:_____3/27/2924_____

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"_____

Title of Copyrighted Work: __*Destroyer* (2020) by Victor LaValle – The Akai-creature's pieced together body reminiscent of the culture-text iconography_____

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from:
https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20a ny%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

APPENDIX K:

USF FAIR USE FORM

WUTHERING HEIGHTS. THEATRICAL POSTER. DIR. WILLIAM WYLER, SAMUEL GOLDWYN PROD. 1938

INSTRUCTIONS

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Name: Urshela Wiggins McKinney   Date: 3/27/2924

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"

Title of Copyrighted Work: *Wuthering Heights.* Theatrical Poster. dir. William Wyler, Samuel Goldwyn prod. 1938

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

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APPENDIX L:

USF FAIR USE FORM

WUTHERING HEIGHTS, SOLOMON GLAVE AND SHANNON BEER, SCENE STILL.

DIR. ANDREA ARNOLD, HANWAY FILMS, 2011

INSTRUCTIONS

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Name: ___Urshela Wiggins McKinney_____ Date:_____3/27/2924_____

Class or Project: Doctoral Dissertation: "Making the Invisible Visible: (Re)envisioning the Black Body in Contemporary Adaptations of Nineteenth-Century Fiction"_____

Title of Copyrighted Work: *Wuthering Heights, Solomon Glave and Shannon Beer, scene still. dir. Andrea Arnold, Hanway Films, 2011*_____

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USF FAIR USE FORM

***WUTHERING HEIGHTS*. U.S. THEATRICAL POSTER. DIR. ANDREA ARNOLD,**

HANWAY FILMS, 2011

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USF FAIR USE FORM

***BLACULA: RETURN OF THE KING* (2023) BY RODNEY BARNES**

OPENING IMAGES OF *BLACULA: RETURN OF THE KING*

INSTRUCTIONS

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Title of Copyrighted Work: <u> *Blacula: Return of The King* (2023) by Rodney Barnes -</u>

<u>Opening images of *Blacula: Return of The King*</u>

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APPENDIX O:

USF FAIR USE FORM

BLACULA: RETURN OF THE KING (2023) BY RODNEY BARNES

MAMUWALDE VICIOUSLY ATTACKS WHITE POLICE OFFICERS

INSTRUCTIONS

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_____Mamuwalde viciously attacks white police officers_____

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USF FAIR USE FORM

BLACULA: RETURN OF THE KING (2023) BY RODNEY BARNES MAMUWALDE

REMEMBERS THE YOUNG WARRIORS FROM HIS AFRICAN TRIBE

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<u>Mamuwalde remembers the young warriors from his African tribe</u>_____

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