

## L'héroïne, oiseau en cage dans *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte Brontë et *Rebecca* d'Alfred Hitchcock

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### Abstract

Dans le quatrième chapitre de son ouvrage intitulé *Brontë Transformations* (1996), Patsy Stoneman révèle l'importance des reprises et transformations dont a fait l'objet *Jane Eyre* (1847) de Charlotte Brontë dans diverses pièces de théâtre, romans et films depuis sa publication initiale. L'un des avatars les plus intéressants mentionné par P. Stoneman est *Rebecca* d'Alfred Hitchcock (1940) d'après le roman à succès éponyme de Daphné Du Maurier paru en 1938. Parmi les nombreux éléments communs au roman de Brontë et au film d'Hitchcock figurent l'héroïne orpheline consciente de son physique ordinaire, un personnage masculin maussade doté d'une épouse "présente-absente" et une intendante dont le tempérament influence l'atmosphère du manoir dans lequel l'héroïne réside temporairement. Un autre point commun, plus difficile à déceler car profondément intégré à chaque œuvre, est le portrait de l'héroïne en oiseau prisonnier. Ce(tte) subtile trope/métaphore mérite d'être remarqué(e) car non seulement l'image constitue un lien entre les deux œuvres mais elle permet aussi, dans ses diverses manifestations, de les différencier. Tandis que dans *Jane Eyre*, l'image de l'oiseau apparaît chaque fois que Jane s'échappe d'un lieu qui l'emprisonne, celle de la cage s'avère être l'élément dominant dans le film d'Hitchcock, imposant finalement des limites infranchissables à la liberté de l'héroïne.



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## Jane Air: The Heroine as Caged Bird in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca*

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Paul Marchbanks's recent dissertation carves out a scholarly space for theorizing intellectual difference within contemporary disability studies by examining constructions of mental retardation and autism spectrum disorders in Romantic and Victorian literature. The project considers some of the more pervasive systems of thought challenged by Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, Robert Browning and the Brontë sisters as they shape progressive visions of people with disabilities in close communion with one another and the able-minded. Paul Marchbanks has a number of articles forthcoming in 2006, including "Lessons in Lunacy: Mental Illness in Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine*" to be published in *New Hibernia Review*, "Hierarchies of Mind: An Abiding Critique of Intellectualist Ideology and Discourse in Robert Browning's Poetry" which has been accepted by the *Victorian Institute Journal*, and "From Caricature to Character: Renderings of the Intellectually Disabled in Dickens's Novels" which is now being published across three consecutive issues in *Dickens Quarterly*.

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**I**n the fourth chapter of *Brontë Transformations* (1996), Patsy Stoneman reveals the considerable extent to which Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) has been recycled and reconfigured across a wide array of plays, novels and films since its initial publication. One of the more interesting progeny mentioned by Stoneman is Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), a film based on Daphne Du Maurier's popular novel of the same name (1938). Joan Fontaine, who only four years later would interpret the role of Jane Eyre herself opposite Orson Welles' Rochester, plays a similarly situated heroine in Hitchcock's first American movie. Among the many elements shared by Brontë's novel and Hitchcock's film are an orphaned heroine preoccupied with her ostensibly plain appearance, a brooding male protagonist with an "absent-present" wife, and a housekeeper whose disposition pervades the country house where the heroine temporarily resides. Another thread binding the two works, one sometimes harder to see because more tightly woven into their fabric, involves the clever configuration of the heroine as a *caged bird*. This subtle authorial trope rewards the effort necessary to recognize it: the motif not only ties the works together but serves in its varying manifestations to differentiate them. While in *Jane Eyre* the avian element of the metaphor gains ascendancy each time Jane flies free of her

successive confinements, in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* the cage proves the dominant component, firmly and finally restricting the heroine it encloses.

The association of women with birds has an extended, often degrading history. As Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan argue in *Animals and Women* (1995), the notion of feminine inferiority has long been shrewdly reinforced by repeated pairings of females with animals, especially domesticated and farm animals (Introduction: 1, 6). In "Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots" (1995), Joan Dunayer writes that "applying images of denigrated nonhuman species to women labels women inferior and available for abuse; attaching images of the aggrandized human species to men designates them superior and entitled to exploit" (11). Linguist Alleen Pace Nilsen recalls, in "Sexism as Shown through the English Vocabulary" (1977), the many exploitative and diminutive feminine tags informed by the chicken alone, one of our less auspicious fowl:

A young girl is a *chick*. When she gets old enough she marries and soon begins feeling *cooped up*. To relieve the boredom she goes to *hen parties* and *cackles* with her friends. Eventually she has her *brood*, begins to *henpeck* her husband, and finally turns into an *old biddy*. (29)

This penchant for debasing avian appellations reflects a well-established tradition of differentiating gender roles by deploying discrete bestial identities to either sex.

Dunayer's words about the gender divide accurately describe the Victorian era in which Charlotte Brontë herself lived. Victorian writers more readily associated the masculine with powerful birds like the eagle or hawk, linking women to weaker and less imposing birds, those known more for their attractive appearance and delicate music than their strength. Elizabeth Gaskell's heroines in *Wives and Daughters* (1866), for instance, construct one another as hen-sparrows (67) or little birds (313, 490), while Lucy Snowe of Charlotte Brontë's own *Villette* (1853) draws comparisons between females and humming-birds or doves (212, 265). Avian metaphor empowers the *male* hero, as when Lucy likens Paul Emanuel to a hawk exerting control over all within his reach (289) and later, more benevolently, to a bird large and capable enough to shelter three old and feeble people under "one kind wing" (499). Notably, the kinds of songbirds linked with women prove more likely, due to their size and temperament, to make apt indoor pets.

As Elaine Shefer illustrates in *Birds, Cages and Women in Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite Art* (1990), constructing specifically *avian* identifications proved the easier given the omnipresence of birds throughout Victorian culture, especially in the home. Mid-century England had witnessed an exponential increase in sales of exotic cages and aviaries, and birds were now everywhere—in the domestic as well as the social space (17). Some

Victorians employed birds for didactic purposes in ways that delivered neatly packaged prescriptions for appropriate female behavior. Anthropomorphically interpreted, the caged bird's apparently patient and loving child-rearing practices modeled cardinal virtues for those in the home at leisure to observe and learn, while a domestic aviary full of species-specific dispositions provided practical case studies of a wide range of personality traits (Shefer 18-22). Making available such object lessons for purposes of shaping female character understandably necessitated *capture* with sticky bird-lime and subsequent *imprisonment* in cage or aviary. It is no surprise that women came to be associated so frequently with imprisoned birds given such creatures' subtle didactic role and proximity. The Victorian artisan, already well-attuned to the female form as the most salient of visible artifacts, apparently proved nervous about endowing such visions with too mobile a metaphor. If females were to evoke images of winged birds, they were likely to be images of caged birds, protected and controlled. Contemporary paintings such as Walter H. Deverell's "A Pet" (1853) and "The Grey Parrot" (1852-53) deposit birds in cages and place women next to windows and doors that open onto enticing views of life beyond the domestic sphere. When these women do step beyond the restrictive space bounded by their window, mobility often remains limited. Outdoor scenes like that in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Gate of Memory" (1857-64) depict females no further removed from the home than the front entrance, thus maintaining a strong echo of what Shefer calls the "pictorial cliché of the cottage-home—the bird in the cage" (67). It seems likely that such art, impregnated with models of woman's appropriate place reinforced delimiting notions of femininity.

How audacious, then, that Brontë flipped this metaphor's most common gender assumptions in *Jane Eyre*, transforming a commonly restricting metaphor into a liberating one! At first glance, the avian connection might seem a bit restrictive. Following her imaginative identification with birds as a child (4-5, 31-32, 87), Jane's most obvious linkage with the avian appears courtesy of Rochester and the half-ironic, half-demeaning terms of endearment with which he addresses his "sprite" (276). Among the many figural monikers employed, Rochester includes "bird," "dove," "linnet," and "skylark" (256, 314-315, 427), and he elsewhere describes Jane as trapped and struggling "like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation" (318). While Jane asserts her autonomy by overtly rejecting the avian identity assigned her by this Victorian patriarch (319), she elsewhere consciously appropriates such an association by anthropomorphizing birds in order to clarify her own emotional experience. She wonders what birds think of her, equates their singing with her own joyful state, and—upon escaping Thornfield—

compares birds' apparent faithfulness to one another with her late abandonment of Rochester (426-427, 260, 410).

Jane's other avian qualities emerge as Brontë establishes a more inconspicuous but frequently reiterated connection between her heroine and the *wind*. Like those airborne birds whose presence she senses during personal crises, Jane proves herself attuned to the breezes about her, currents which signify more than mere temperature and weather changes. As in other Gothic novels, wind here helps to establish ambience, echo emotion, and heighten action. During Jane's sojourn at Lowood, for instance, Brontë uses the wind to punctuate an array of significant moments. The "furious gusts" which manage to interrupt her first night's rest at school continue to frustrate her and the other students' attempts to sleep and drink, whistling through the cracks in their windows and turning their water to ice (49, 59). Later, as Jane contemplates the recent, unjust flogging of the virtuous Helen Burns, the "disconsolate moan of the wind outside" mirrors her inner turmoil (61). Such appearances of wind as a kind of personal stage prop or effect for the heroine rush upon one another throughout the narrative, strengthening associations of Jane with the avian. Variations in the wind's intensity mark the dissonance between Rochester's problematic proposal to Jane and her innocent, mistaken trust in him: the wind roars harshly as background accompaniment to Rochester's desperate pleas and whispers softly during Jane's romantic reveries the next morning (322-324). Following Jane's flight from marriage, intermittent gusts of wind keep the tired and starving heroine alert as she wanders about on the heath (413). The moment that St. John asks Jane to marry him, a distinct breeze from the west colors the scene (512), and as Jane approaches her final destination—the manor-house of Ferndean where she will reunite with her beloved—a brisk gale penetrates the darkening evening (550).

While such passages paint the dramatic presence of wind as it swirls about Jane in critical moments, other scenes reveal an even more intimate connection between this invisible force and the heroine. A closer look reveals that Brontë has made Jane not only casually aware of but—just as a bird would be—specifically attuned to the wind. In a feverish state as she awaits her future husband's return to Thornfield, Jane hears the gale and goes outside just so that she may feel it on her body (347). Though first driven towards the sheltering orchard by the strong south wind, Jane soon revels in the quickening gusts, allowing herself to be swept up by their rush in a scene which approximates more closely than any other to the image of a bird in flight:

Instead of subsiding as night drew on, it seemed to augment its rush and deepen its roar: the trees blew steadfastly one way [...] the clouds drifted from pole to pole, fast following, mass on mass [...]. It was not without a certain wild pleasure I ran before the wind, delivering my



trouble of mind to the measureless air-torrent thundering through space. (348)

Her bird-like intimacy with the wind also allows Jane to read its presence or absence like a weather forecaster turned clairvoyant. As she explains to Rochester, the day before he returned from his pre-wedding absence she knew him to be well because “the calmness of the air and sky forbade apprehensions regarding [his] safety or comfort on [his] journey” (354). Later, however, when the wind rose and blew with an incessant, “sullen, moaning sound,” she knew something exciting was about to happen and was unable to sleep (355). After Jane relates the encounter with Bertha which followed this portentous feeling, Rochester replies, “chase dull care away, Janet. Don’t you hear to what soft whispers the wind has fallen?” (361). As if recognizing her affinity for the wind, he is reminding her to allow its familiar strokes to wash away her lingering anxiety. Elsewhere, her facility at depicting wind in her artwork strikes him even more powerfully. The wind apparently infiltrates not only her unconscious creative spaces (355-357), but her more deliberate creations: her untutored ability to paint wind dumbfounds the incredulous, artistically sophisticated Rochester (154-155).

The unnamed heroine of Du Maurier’s novel and Hitchcock’s film, by contrast, finds her own association with the avian world unwilling to bestow any such empowering clarification of identity, though birds do actively shape her imagination, including her conception of Maxim’s estate as an ideal and secure space (357). In a moment that echoes Jane’s sometime conviction that not a tie holds her to humanity (325, 348), Du Maurier’s heroine even reflects on the company of birds as preferable to that of humans (151). This identification with Nature’s feathered progeny, however, does not significantly change her situation from that of victim, a situation Hitchcock captures to great effect. In a key character moment for the heroine, one captured on Maxim’s video camera and later exhibited back at Manderley, a group of waddling ducks circle a helplessly childish Joan Fontaine. Her reaction to the birds—cringing with elbows tight against her sides, then smiling with a befuddled look and outstretched arms as they pass her by—underscores that this particular avian connection will only make more manifest the heroine’s foolishness and vulnerability. As in Du Maurier’s book, the one moment that suggests a connection between the married heroine and the empowering flight of a bird is that nearly fatal one in which, at the prompting of the villainous housekeeper Mrs. Danvers, the heroine contemplates flying out the window to her death. Wind appears frequently in the film, but almost always as an antagonistic force. Wind does briefly blow through the heroine’s hair as she stands atop a dangerous cliff in her first scene,

momentarily suggesting the flight of a bird through space. Unfortunately, this moment only teasingly establishes that symbolic freedom which will be lost as she falls under the sway of the cool but condescending Maxim only moments later. When the wind appears elsewhere, it proves consistently problematic. It helps drench her with rainwater as the newly married couple approach the estate following their honeymoon, making her quite a sorry sight when she first steps into Manderley and meets the intimidating Mrs. Danvers. It also stirs the crashing sea to which Hitchcock flashes every now and then, reminding us of the absent-presence of Maxim's dead wife, Rebecca. This particular incarnation of avian Jane benefits little from her association with birds, instead remaining bound to the ground of Maxim's prescriptions for appropriate wifely behavior.

Even those seemingly empowering moments the film adds to Du Maurier's story – moments which might seem to align her more closely with the increasingly self-sufficient heroine of Brontë's novel – serve only as foils which make more undeniable her powerlessness. Robert Sherwood's screenplay adds a very melodramatic scene in which the perpetually flustered Mrs. de Winter finally decides to take control and rid the morning room of Rebecca's things. She calls Mrs. Danvers to the room and, lit from behind by the sun and accompanied by a crescendo of stringed instruments, tells the housekeeper in a newly authoritative voice to clear Rebecca's letters and decorations from the room: "I am Mrs. de Winter now." This vivid moment might signify a real shift in power if we actually saw the heroine, at least briefly, begin to appropriate and personalize this space as her own, and if Mrs. Danvers did not immediately demonstrate her continued, malevolent control of Manderley's new mistress. Within minutes of this confrontation, Mrs. Danvers deceives the heroine into creating a party dress that will earn not Maxim's admiration but his rancor. Once the damage is done and the heroine has run from the guests in tears, Mrs. Danvers presses her advantage, mesmerizing the heroine with fatalistic tones and words that nearly lead to the latter's suicide. The heroine has obviously gained no lasting empowerment from her fleeting assertiveness. Even the final scene outside burning Manderley, one which appears to demonstrate Maxim's now unconfused concern and affection for his wife, fails to convince us that she has truly escaped the cage of his condescension and her own self-doubt. That the couple's marriage will now be characterized by a new and lasting appreciation for one another seems doubtful if, as Robin Wood reminds us, one remembers the film's opening, framing flashback:

Maxim de Winter [...] can relate only to a child-wife who unquestioningly adores him and over whom he can exert total control. The film implies (in

direct contradiction to the generically guaranteed and generally taken-for-granted “happy ending”) that he stops loving her when she loses her innocence and grows up. The heroine’s opening and closing voice-over narrative nowhere suggests present happiness (though Manderley is burned, Mrs. Danvers dead, and Rebecca’s ghost officially laid to rest): indeed, it fails even to establish that the couple are still together. (Wood 232)

Brontë’s heroine, on the other hand, makes definite progress throughout her own narrative. What Karen Chase describes as Jane’s long journey through various physical spaces, metaphorical spaces, and spaces within spaces is illuminated further by the image of a bird carving its way through breeze and blast (Chase 63-64). While Jane does not completely escape her imprisoning habit of self-deprecation, she does to a large degree break free of the successive glass cages into which convention and society’s disdain would place her. At Gateshead, for instance, the dependent and mistreated orphan girl soon overcomes her cruel aunt and cousins. The two “wings” Jane successfully exercises to lift herself free of restraint include a command of the visual and a mastery of the oral. In the first chapter alone, she appropriates both of these typically masculine modes, locking a *gaze* on John which drives him to strike her (12) and responding with vehement *words* (13) to the unjust retribution she receives for her supposed insolence. Though seemingly impotent at first, her words later hit their target (39) when she accuses Mrs. Reed of forgetting the promise she gave her dying husband to care for their little niece. Jane’s actions result in her restriction to the nursery, but this to her represents a valuable freedom, a liberation from the presence of offensive relatives. Her strong will and determination win her this temporary respite and, a little later, a change of locale filled with new possibilities when she removes to a boarding school. Jane continues to employ effectively both the visual and oral as she moves from Lowood school to Rochester’s Thornfield to St. John’s Marsh End.

While admitting that Jane does escape a series of cages, more than a few critics argue that Jane’s finally and voluntarily delivering herself into matrimonial bondage at the story’s close undermines any sense of freedom she might have demonstrated<sup>1</sup>. The specific dynamic governing her relationship with Rochester at the novel’s end, however, reveals what

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<sup>1</sup> A few critics discover a problematic ending. Boumelha has difficulty reconciling the sense of female heroism at the end with various, unresolved social and colonial issues (134) and argues that Jane inherits the earth only because she learns to know her place in a prescribed domestic space (137-39). Others include Hoeveler and Jadwin, who point to Jane’s continued use of “sir” in addressing Rochester as evidence of lingering inequality (74), and Elisabeth Bronfen, who believes that Jane’s empowering liminality ends with a marriage which fixes her in a rigid, masculine symbolic order (201-2). To the latter position in particular, I would argue there is no reason to assume Jane has lost the empowering avian symbology with which we have seen her repeatedly connected.



in avian terms seems more like a nest than a cage. After racing to Thornfield “like the messenger-pigeon flying home” (425) and finding a burnt wreck, Jane’s continued search discovers Rochester at Ferndean. She arrives like the skylark Rochester calls her (442), finally free of restraint and mistress of her own fate. Not only has her newly acquired wealth made her financially autonomous and socially independent (438), but Rochester’s current blindness and subsequent dependence on Jane underscore her agency. The image Jane conjures to explain their new relationship fittingly reflects the balance of Jane’s continued self-deprecation with her new sense of power: “The water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence: just as if a royal eagle, chained to a perch, should be forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor” (442).

Jane exercises this new authority frequently. Just as her words and actions console and revive Rochester on the day of their reunion (440), so her unique power over the stereotypically masculine word and gaze continues to serve her as she cares for this dependent:

He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us—and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. (454)

Even after ten years, when Rochester has regained his sight and no longer depends so completely on his wife, Jane tells us that mutual, reciprocal love and respect continue to characterize their relationship: “I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine” (454). She has placed herself in a nest where she retains the agency gained before making this final landing.

Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* proves far more interested in the spectacle of a caged and intimidated heroine than an empowered one. The film snatches any vestiges of agency from this incarnation of Jane *Air* by weakening the heroine’s avian connection and solidifying the caging trope. Hitchcock begins this process by employing bar-like shadows to capture the heroine’s form at every turn. Strong shadows characterized most of Hitchcock’s black-and-white films in the 1940s, as he preferred shooting on a sound stage when possible. The artificial lighting created sharply demarcated lines and shadows useful for creating melodramatic effects, as evidenced in *Suspicion* (1941) and *The Paradine Case* (1948). As Lina’s distrust of her husband solidifies towards the end of *Suspicion*, a complex network of crisscrossing shadows map themselves across the living room, echoing visually the web of deceit spun by John Asgarth. Similarly, in *The Paradine Case*, bar-like shadows reinforce the sense of Mrs. Paradine’s incarceration, held as she is by both the prison

authorities' suspicions and the web of lies in which she has entangled herself. The grid of shadows cast inside her country home during the detective work of Gregory Peck's character suggests that Mrs. Paradine's house is a locked cage, one the audience will later find to be filled with sordid secrets.

Such imprisoning shadows prove ubiquitous in *Rebecca*, visually caging the heroine scene after scene across changing locales. At every opportunity, Hitchcock throws his strong stage lights at her through window lattice-works, stair railings, and wrought iron work shaped like twisting ivy, turning harmless domestic objects into an imprisoning system of jail-like bars and elaborate webs. Caging shadows first encompass her in her sleep as her unconscious attempts to assimilate the information she has overheard about the nature of Rebecca's death and Maxim's subsequent grief. This network of dark lines follows her to the dance floor during her and Maxim's clandestine courting, and when it appears in her hotel room after Mrs. Van Hopper has told her they must leave immediately, it foreshadows the imprisonment the heroine unknowingly considers as she ponders leaving her employment to pursue her lover. When she does encounter him in his room and, in so many stumbling words, begs that he take her away with him, the light coming through the windowpane creates an appropriately imprisoning lacework of shadows. At Manderley, prison bar-like shadows first locate her as she steps out of her room in the east wing into a hall reminiscent of catacombs, and again find her as she walks from the breakfast room (where even the chairs are marked by vertical lines) and towards Rebecca's morning room. Vertical bars capture her form as she overhears Maxim's sister and brother-in-law belittling her character before she has even met them, sweep across the floor towards her when she enters Rebecca's old room in the West Wing, and appear on the door and at the top of the stairs immediately after the departure of Rebecca's devious cousin Favell (another male whose condescending words and gaze suffocate her). Thus Manderley itself, an intimidating character in its own right, entraps the heroine at nearly every turn.

Other visual tricks amplify the motif of entrapment. As Donald Spoto notes, the move from bright to dark hues over the course of the movie reflects a parallel change in tone:

The first third of the film is very bright, both indoors and out, and light-colored clothing predominates. In the second third of the film—the journey to Manderley and the early works there—gray tones gain the ascendancy. Then, as the heroine's dilemma becomes more intense and the mystery nears its complex solution, shadows overtake the décor and black clothing is seen most often. (*The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, 92)

The heroine is further restricted through the house's exaggerated proportions and by means of various camera techniques, all of which make the new Mrs. de Winter seem like a small, helpless creature in an enormous and confusing labyrinth:

Mise-en-scène and camerawork collaborate with the script to convey the heroine's sense of her own insignificance; she is continually dwarfed by the huge halls in which she wanders, and even the door-knobs are placed shoulder-level so that the viewer receives a subliminal impression of her as a child peering in on or intruding into an adult world that provokes both curiosity and dread. A characteristic camera movement in the film begins with a close-up of the heroine receiving a bit of unwelcome news about Rebecca's superiority and then tracking out to a long shot in which she seems small, helpless, and alone. (Modleski 47)

That caging device which most dramatically reduces the heroine's agency, however, involves the delimiting gaze that Jane Eyre so efficiently appropriated, but which persistently victimizes Hitchcock's heroine. In *Rebecca*, male and female alike direct their gaze against the heroine, suggesting a motif of hunter and hunted which Hitchcock first developed for this film (Truffaut 93). Mrs. Danvers and Maxim pummel Joan Fontaine's character with hard stares, gazes which terrify and immobilize the heroine. The cold eyes of Mrs. Danvers, that housekeeper whose shockingly sudden appearances jar uncomfortably with her seeming immobility, effectively root the heroine in place. This power appears each time she catches the new Mrs. De Winter in one of her many little accidents, and manifests itself vividly in the scene where she discovers the curious heroine in Rebecca's old, uninhabited room. After hearing from Mrs. Danvers more unwanted information about how wonderful Rebecca was, the heroine desires desperately to leave the room but cannot until Mrs. Danvers releases her from the pressure of her vicious stare. Maxim's angry gaze proves even more painful when it surfaces, coming as it does from one who should be the heroine's source of comfort in these new and frightening surroundings. When she imprudently brings up those secrets still surrounding Rebecca's life and death in a subtle bid for information, he locks on her a deadly look filled with seething animosity tightly restrained. It is a gaze by which Laurence Olivier "project[s] an enigmatic, inhuman coldness that must strike us as no mere act, as though his gaze has the power to kill" (Rothman 121). Mrs. Danvers' expression may be cold and intimidating, but at least it is consistent; Maxim's gaze is all the more petrifying for being unexpected.

Hitchcock's own presence apparently added yet another layer of caging to Joan Fontaine's performance of the new Mrs. de Winter. The high degree of control Hitchcock exercised over his actors on set surprises no one familiar with his directing style, but of more particular note is the stifled feeling experienced by many of his leading ladies, as if he were

being *too* paternal and protective (Haley 128). Michael Haley suggests an almost sadistic tendency on Hitchcock's part: "He liked blondes—cool, quiet, and utterly controlled blondes that he could manipulate on the screen and often reduce to an emotional wreck" (Haley 126). One wonders to what degree the anxiety reported by Joan Fontaine was sustained by Hitchcock's desire for emotional authenticity under the camera's eye, and to what degree it fed some more questionable desire to have beautiful women under his thumb:

He wanted total control over me, and he seemed to relish the cast not liking one another [...] Now of course this helped my performance, since I was supposed to be terrified of everyone, and it gave a lot of tension to my scenes [...] He kept me off balance, much to his own delight. He would constantly tell me that no one thought I was good except himself. (*The Dark Side of Genius* 219)

The unnamed heroine obviously has much to fight against. In addition to other characters' condescending remarks and critical appraisal of her class and carriage—factors the impoverished Jane ultimately dealt with and overcame—Hitchcock's bird has to deal with layer upon layer of caging shadows, the ubiquitous and immobilizing gaze, and the filmmaker's own personality and prescriptions for her character. The most modern hero proves, ultimately, to be the most trapped, her wings beating helplessly against an ever-shrinking cage. It is as if the ineffectual cages of *Jane Eyre* have been recast with thicker bars, the cage more firmly wrought in the heat of Du Maurier's novel finally cooling, in Hitchcock's film, into hard reality.

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