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## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **Reading Between the Lines: Clothes, Linens and Washing-Lines in Film and Practice**

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**Reading Between the Lines:  
Clothes, Linens and Washing-Lines in Film and Practice**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for a Doctorate in Practice-led Film  
Bangor University

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## Abstract

This research investigates the creative use of expressive drapery and textiles, and in particular the line of washing, in three films that have rich displays of fabrics and costume: *The Piano* (dir. Jane Campion, 1993), *The Governess* (dir. Sandra Goldbacher, 1998) and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (dir. Peter Webber, 2003); and provides the inspiration for a series of short films that explore positive and negative aspects of clotheslines and textiles.

The research areas of Film Costume, Fashion Studies and Art History each provide relevant context and background to the study of the clothes and linens in the three films under consideration. Significant themes that are considered include: cinema's ambivalent relationship with costume; dress, undress and the male gaze; representations of historical and character-coded clothing; the expression of fantasy and desire through textiles and costume; and the contribution of art history towards creating an understanding of fabrics that denote a separation between the ordinary and extraordinary and between reality and an imaginary sphere.

Mary Ann Doane's study of the gaze at the interface of the interior and exterior of the home in the 'woman's film' leads her to consider the frequent portrayal of women waiting by or looking through windows in relation to Freud's theory of The Uncanny and leads me to recognize that the line of washing in cinema also denotes the limits of a woman's space within the grounds of her home and marks a formal boundary between the familiar and the unknown. Similarly, the line of washing reflects notions of The



Uncanny in displays that portray tensions between the opposing themes of the seen and unseen, the spoken and unspoken, of presence and absence and of purity and contamination.

The idea of familiar clothes and linens displayed on the line of washing as alternately comforting and disconcerting has become the focus of my practice. Some of the works have been shown individually during the course of this study in group and open art exhibitions, and a solo exhibition at Galeri Caernarfon 15<sup>th</sup> January – 24<sup>th</sup> February 2017 showed the collected short films and supporting material resulting from the research.

## Introduction

### Situation

I love to see a full line of washing blowing in the wind on a fine day. I see care, order and a sense of openness in the revelation of a household's recently-washed clothes and linens. For example, a row of white shirts, a brightly-patterned dress or a collection of cheery-looking beach towels evokes a range of thoughts associated with wearing and caring for the clothes and fabrics that cover and comfort us through life's ordinary events and special occasions.

The artist David Hockney says that 'we see with memory' (Gayford, 2016) and I have no doubt that my attachment to fabrics and clotheslines comes from the time when, aged about eight, I was given the task of hanging out the family wash on an unusually large and imposing Hills Hoist<sup>1</sup> that my mother had imported from Australia. I can clearly recall one bright morning feeling content and responsible in the simple task of ordering the laundry in formations of various sizes and colours, allied with a sense of how the dew underfoot, blue sky overhead and the early morning noises filling the air connected me to the wider world.

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<sup>1</sup> A Hills Hoist is a sturdy, height-adjustable rotary clothesline that is a common feature in the backyards of Australia and New Zealand. Frequently regarded as Australian icons, the Hills Hoist is often used by artists as a metaphor for suburbia.

In the Japanese cult movie *After Life* (dir. Hirokazu Koreeda, 1998) a group of recently-deceased people meet with counsellors to decide upon the single happiest memory of their life which is then re-enacted and made into a film that they are then allowed to take with them into eternity. For example, one young girl recalls the time when she was about three, watching a line of white washing drying gently in the breeze as she snuggled into the warmth of her mother's lap. It occurs to me that the childhood memory I have of hanging out lines of clothes in a dew-soaked, birdsong-filled garden could easily be the film I would want to take into the after-life. Before then, however, I recognize an element of truth in what Jean Renoir says about a filmmaker only ever making one film during a lifetime,<sup>2</sup> in that my work, engendered from that one memory, is constantly revisiting and exploring situations, emotions and standpoints concerning the clothesline.

I accept that over time I have also come under the influence of the language and images of washing powder advertising, such as the *Omo* and *Persil* commercials studied by Barthes who identifies the construction of ideas that make an enemy of dirt and encourage a social pressure to display signs of respectability with clothes and linens that are visibly whiter, thus purer, than achievable with other products (1972, pp. 36-8). It must also be acknowledged that a positive response to the line of washing is by no means universal, as demonstrated by restrictions imposed by many home-owner associations in

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<sup>2</sup> 'But you know, everyone really only makes one film in his life, and then he breaks it up into fragments and makes it again, with just a few little variations each time.' Jean Renoir in conversation with Louis Marcorelles (Cardullo 2005, p. 113).

the U.S. and elsewhere that stigmatize outdoor clotheslines as socially and economically undesirable.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of making my earliest short films around the subject of laundry and linens I started to notice a profusion of clotheslines in cinema, in genres as diverse as animation, documentary, historical drama, horror, musicals and Westerns, that led me to make a more careful study of washing lines scenes in the movies. Many examples of clotheslines in cinema are ambitious constructions that hold pleasing, plentiful displays of linens, for example in *The Diary of Anne Frank* (dir. George Stevens, 1958) an exterior shot pans down roof tiles to show Anne (Millie Perkins) standing by a broken window in the attic and behind her multiple row upon row of linens flutter in the breeze. Then, an interior shot shows a hand playing with a toy boat in a wash tub that pans up to reveal Peter on one side of the washing lines and Anne at the window. A courtship ritual then ensues as they alternately approach each other by ducking under the lines of worn textiles. In *Everything is Illuminated* (dir. Liev Shrieber, 2005) line after line of white cloths wave about gently in a clearing cut into a huge field of sunflowers; and in *Ray* (dir. Taylor Hackford, 2004) two little boys make their play amongst parallel rows of sheets. However, on closer study it is soon apparent that the washing lines are not simply in position to offer a familiar, pleasant or uplifting domestic detail, but instead represent a

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<sup>3</sup> See the Project Laundry List Right to Dry Campaign: <http://laundrylist.org/get-involved/advocacy/the-right-to-dry-campaign/> [Accessed 13 December 2016].

metaphorical line separating the lives of the characters situated within it as distinct from those on the other side.

The line can thus be seen to divide into areas that represent opposing situations showing, for example, a gulf between the domesticated and undomesticated; and contrasting concepts such as pride and shame; guilt and innocence; concealment and revelation; and reality and fantasy. For example, more often than not, when a character passing by or under a clothesline towards a family home or other setting, the point is to show them passing from an open space into a private domain, usually from rough or wild terrain into an enclosed, cultivated, calm space. Every so often, men are also to be found in the space around the washing line, but often this will be in the context of visual or verbal comedic sequences where their masculinity is underplayed. For example, in *Blazing Saddles* (dir. Mel Brooks, 1974) the infamous ‘fart scene’ concludes with Mongo (Alex Karras), sitting with his back to a line of washing hung with long-johns, as he sets his hat ablaze whilst trying to light a cigar in the camp fire; and in *The Full Monty* (dir. Peter Cattaneo, 1997) Lomper and Guy, wearing only red underpants and socks, grab items from a line to cover their skinny, pale bodies as they leap over walls and under washing lines, laughing at their own audacity. Clotheslines are frequently used to illustrate a strong sense of community, as in *My Left Foot* (dir. Jim Sheridan, 1989) when the young men play football on the concrete courtyard of the tenement where the communal washing lines are set; in *The Commitments* (dir. Alan Parker, 1991) as the backing singers rehearse in a public square watched by neighbours from their doorways; and in *The Damned United* (dir. Tom Hooper, 2009) youngsters lean over a wall between back-to-back houses strung

with washing to cheer on their local heroes at football training. Additionally, sheer, white linens hanging on a line are a perfect surface on which to project ideas of fantasy and desire, as seen, for example, in the opening scene of *And God Created Woman* (dir. Roger Vadim, 1956) as the young Juliette (Brigitte Bardot) is shown sunbathing naked behind a sheet where she is propositioned by the mature, wealthy M. Carradine (Curd Jürgens); in *Hairspray* (dir. Adam Shankman, 2007) Edna (John Travolta) and Wilbur (Christopher Walken) reaffirm their love for one another in a complex dance sequence under lines of washing; and in *Fish Tank* (dir. Andrea Arnold, 2009) Joanne (Kierston Wareing) talks on the phone to her friend and makes explicit reference to her new lover's sexual prowess as she unpins his shirts from the line.

It is also of interest to consider whether the way clothes and linens hang on the line is of importance to the reading of a scene, and how these may relate to a broader understanding of textiles in a film. One of the most important aspects of clothes on a line is in the uncanny way they can evoke either the living body of the person who owns an individual item, as in Ada's (Holly Hunter) dress that swings behind her in agitation during an argument in *The Piano* (dir. Jane Campion, 1993), or the way it can stir up a distinct memory of a moment when certain items were worn or used, as seen in *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang* (dir. Susanna White, 2010) when the mother remembers her wedding day as she hangs out the tattered veil.

The crossed line of washing often signifies a threat to the status quo of those inhabiting its peaceful, composed side and thus shows the point at which conflict arises in situations

that can vary from simple misunderstandings or quarrels to the ultimate crossing-the-line situation that has murderous intent. Examples of the latter can be seen in *Heaven's Gate* (dir. Michael Cimino, 1980) when an innocent man is shot in cold blood as he works inside an arrangement of white sheets; in *Cold Mountain* (dir. Anthony Minghella, 2003) when a lawless posse of horsemen scare a woman away from her laundry as they ride onto her property intent on luring her sons out of hiding; and in *Inglourious Basterds* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2009) Col. Landa (Christoph Waltz) strides menacingly past the clothesline of M. LaPeditte (Denis Ménochet) to interrogate him about the missing Dreyfus family.

### **Problem**

There seems to be a discrepancy between what I perceive to be symbols of hope and wholesomeness in the line of washing at home or in the landscape compared to my observations of the clothesline in cinema around which threat, menace and danger seem to lurk, leading me to ask the following questions: Why does it seem so shocking when characters in cinema are placed in situations of conflict and violence near to a clothesline? Is it because the forces of discord and brutality they are faced with are in direct opposition to ideas of purity and decency that are often commonly associated with the line of washing? What bearing, if any, do the clothes and/or linens that hang on the line of washing have on our reading of the washing line and wider aspects of understanding the clothes and textiles of a film? There exists a small amount of writing about clotheslines in cinema, notably Jean Cocteau's diary on the making of his film *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) and on Roberta Cantow's 1981 documentary *Clotheslines*.

## **Solution**

This thesis sets out to answer the questions above via an exploration of the creative use of expressive drapery and textiles, and particularly the line of washing, in three films that have abundant displays of fabrics and costume: *The Piano*, *The Governess* (dir. Sandra Goldbacher, 1998) and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (dir. Peter Webber, 2003). This study also undertakes to extend the investigation in the process of making a collection of short films that respond to the idea of clothes and textiles on and around the line of washing as an alternately comforting or disconcerting experience.

## **Existing information on lines of washing and textiles**

Although examples of writing about washing lines in film are scarce, it has been possible to find some useful and inspiring references, including Jean Cocteau's film diary for *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*) from 1946 that has precise details about planning and directing the clothesline scenes, and Roberta Cantow's Emmy award-winning documentary film *Clotheslines* (1981) which received wide critical acclaim at the time of its release and continues to inspire attention and creative endeavours such as the theatrical production 'The Clothesline Muse'<sup>4</sup> (Cantow, 2016).

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<sup>4</sup> *The Clothesline Muse* is a multi-discipline theatrical performance based around an intergenerational story of an old laundress who tells her life story to her feminist granddaughter. See: <http://theclotheslinemuse.com/about/about-the-clothesline-muse/>



In his film diary Cocteau records his experiences of making the clotheslines and filming the washing line scenes on set and on location in *Beauty and the Beast* (1946, pp. ix, 8-12, 15-18, 22, 27, 40). He describes his own personal efforts to create the alleys and labyrinths of linen of his imagination – including the difficulties of sourcing large quantities of sheets in post-war France, carving the clothes props and pegs by hand, hanging out the sheets perfectly, and dampening the linen to make it more transparent for showing dramatic outlines and shadows. Cocteau goes on to describe the pleasure he derived from directing an actor to draw back a sheet as if it were an Italianate stage curtain, by staging a figure in a ‘ravishing’ sky-blue dress against white linen and by framing a shot of some girls dressed in white surrounded by rows of billowing sheets (ibid., pp. 15, 16, 27).

Writing in the *New York Times* in 2003, Ezra Goldstein is prompted by the sight of the strange ‘Giacometti-style’ structures that once supported outdoor laundry poles to recollect how in *Clotheslines* Cantow ‘found women from all over the city willing to talk about the sentiment and folklore invested in the seemingly simple task of hanging clothes out to dry’ (2003). Goldstein quotes Cantow from that time saying ‘I don't want to over-romanticize but amidst the drudgery, there was pride in their work. There was even an aesthetic to it ... So they would hang clothes by colour, by size, creating works of art that would be scrutinized and judged’ (ibid.). Harriette Andreadis’ assessment of the film finds value in the expression of the women’s love-hate relationship with the repetitive labour of washing laundry, but criticizes what she sees as amateurish photography and haphazard editing that fails to develop the subject to a dramatic climax (1986). By

contrast, Hélène Keyssar's impression of *Clotheslines* is of art and social history conjoined. The careful and creative arrangements of the shapes and colours of lines of clothes remind her of 'Painting in motion' as in great works by Vermeer, Cezanne, Rothko and Hopper. The clean washing itself represents the competencies of women involved in a ritual that crosses the borders of family and community, generation and culture and is a joyful symbol of lives lived with energy, lust and desire (1995, pp. 127-130). The film also has an 'audioscape of 21 women's voices' all talking about their relation to laundry in 'a progression of beautifully crafted shots of laundry, and of women and their laundry.' For example, one voice states 'I hated laundry with a passion you cannot imagine.' Another woman speaks about feeling connected to the world through the public display of her man's shirts and socks, and yet another says 'Women who don't consider themselves artistic put a lot of themselves into their household tasks' (Bonner, 2010). Jan Lisa Huttner also draws attention to the film's beautiful musical score by Alice Eve Cohen and notes her appreciation of women communicating their values through their laundry (2007).

Occasionally, useful information on the line of washing will crop up in articles such as Jane Landman's examination of socially acceptable norms of feminine behaviour in *Muriel's Wedding* (dir. P. J. Hogan, 1994), in which Betty (Jeanie Drynan), the depressed and downtrodden mother, sets fire to her garden and the Hills Hoist before committing suicide. Whilst Betty's overdose is covered up, the burnt remains of the clothing left on the line linger in 'mute witness to her final hysterical outbreak' (1996, p. 115). In *An Angel at My Table* (dir. Jane Campion, 1990) Lisa French makes the important

observation that when the girls get to know each other over a garden fence in the Spanish dance scene ‘The washing might seem strangely in the way but it is important as a signifier of female space’ (2007, p. 150). Other examples of washing lines that situate girls and women who find harmony in the company of others are to be found, for example, in *Great Expectations* (dir. David Lean, 1946) as the new housekeeper, Biddy, hears Pip confide his worries and encourages him to think better of himself; in *Fiddler on the Roof* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1971) as the sisters wait for the village matchmaker to visit, they imagine who their future husbands will be; and in *Mamma Mia!* (dir. Phyllida Lloyd, 2008) old girl friends are reunited at a villa for a wedding.

Also, writings on the symbolism of certain fabrics or items of clothing in a film often uncover vital layers of information about characters and situations. For example, in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (dir. Peter Weir, 1975) Bruzzi identifies the frail scrap of white lace clutched in Michael’s dirty hand after his night-time search for the lost girls as a symbol of the unfathomable mystery of what happened that day (1997, p. 48); and in *Blue Velvet* (dir. David Lynch, 1986) Susan Derwin describes the strip of blue velvet that Frank brutally thrusts in Dorothy’s mouth as ‘part of the paraphernalia of fetishism’ he uses to degrade her (1995, p. 109). More often, however, a particular item or garment that is identified for its power to evoke a strong sense of an individual’s identity and feelings such as Tom Reagan’s hat, a mysterious symbol of self-esteem in *Miller’s Crossing* (dirs. Ethan Coen and Joel Coen, 1990) (Restaino, 1998, pp. 106 and 109) or in *Brokeback Mountain* (dir. Ang Lee, 2005) there is the defining moment of tragic lost love when

Ennis (Heath Ledger) discovers his missing blood-stained shirt tucked under another in his dead lover's cupboard 'like two skins, one inside the other' (Patterson 2007, p. 255).

A search for more information about the clothes and linens in the three films under scrutiny comes from the areas of Film Costume, Fashion Studies and Art History which yield rich seams of material that offer insights that can be used to identify meaning and new ways of seeing textiles in cinema. Bruzzi's search to understand meaning in film costume finds a correlation between Roland Barthes' analyses of the fluctuating elements of fashion and cinema's problematic relationship with costume (1977, p. 17). Despite exhaustive efforts to understand the language of fashion via his semiotic code, Barthes identified some connections between costume detail and its meaning, but ultimately it led him to conclude that the ever-changing nature of dress resisted definite meaning (Stafford 2006, pp. 140-144).

Twenty years ago, Pam Cook saw costume as 'one of the most under-researched areas of film history' (1996, p. 41) and Bruzzi finds the costume film much-maligned for being a frivolous, bourgeois undertaking, and questions why fine costumes, 'Delilah-like,' seem to have the potential to 'divest any film they adorn of its critical, intellectual or ironic potential' (1997, pp. 35-36). The type of criticism aimed at film costume in the past reads like a list of complaints against a *femme fatale*, for being: wasteful and excessively expensive (Lurie 1992, p. 142); overtly sexual (Harper 1994, pp. 130-1); inauthentic (Bruzzi 1997, p. 35); unpatriotic and threatening (Cook 1987, p. 17). More recently, Sarah Street notices that derogatory attitudes are gradually being overturned by fresh

ideas that have seen film costume establishing its rightful place as a critical subject area after a long period of neglect (Street 2002, pp. 1-12). For example, Alan Parker's often-repeated quote about 'The Laura Ashley school of filmmaking' (Malcolm, 1992) which is intended to pour scorn on Merchant Ivory-type costume dramas, is reclaimed by Bell and Williams to show that one of the pleasures for the fan of the heritage film is found precisely in the attention given to detailed costume and décor, and also for the positive, central acting roles they give to women of all ages (2010, p. 10).

Another problem with film costume lies in the detrimental way it has been used as 'one of the principal "lures"' to attract the male gaze at women' (Field, 2015, p. 3). Costly clothes and feminine display have had a long history of social and moral disapproval, exacerbated in the twentieth century by Freud who saw women as clothes fetishists with a childlike desire to be looked at and admired (1988, p. 354); by Veblen who saw women as mannequins used for the conspicuous display of their menfolk's wealth and prestige (2005); and by Flügel in his theory of the Great Masculine Renunciation in which men abandoned the pleasure of showy clothes to women and reversed their loss with scopophilia (1930, p. 111).

A turning point came in the 1970s with John Berger's influential television series and book *Ways of Seeing* which considered the construct of the 'ever-recurring' (1972, p. 47) subject of nude, or nearly-nude women in Western art and the consequences such depictions had on subsequent visual representations of women. Of particular interest to this study regarding the portrayal of the lead female characters Ada in *The Piano*, Rosina

(Minnie Driver) in *The Governess* and Griet (Scarlett Johansson) in *Girl With A Pearl Earring* for the way they are represented is Berger's analysis of Memling's painting *Vanity* (c. 1485) and two Tintoretto works of *Susanna and the Elders*<sup>5</sup> (1550 and 1555-1556) in which a woman 'looks back at us looking at her' or looks in a mirror, not out of conceit, Berger asserts, but simply to see herself as men see her. Berger derides the 'blatant male hypocrisy' of turning attention away from the fact that a painting was made entirely for the private pleasure of gazing at a woman by blaming the subject for her apparent vanity (1972, episode 2/pp. 50-51). Then, in 1975, Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) 'marked a huge conceptual leap in film theory ... to the understanding that film viewing always involves gendered identities' (Humm, 1997 p. 17). Mulvey's article considers the way cinema was created to give men the privileged pleasure of actively gazing at women on screen as erotic, passive objects, in what she identifies as acts of scopophilia and voyeurism. Mulvey's issue with the gaze focuses on the double jeopardy of women who are made the focus of male desire within a narrative, which is then emulated by the anonymous male viewer in the cinema audience who also objectifies her. Consequently, Mulvey launched a long-overdue debate surrounding filmmaking processes constructed around a system of gazes and viewpoints that overwhelmingly favour men looking at women and urged feminist directors to find new ways of showing female sexuality through the creation of a different

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<sup>5</sup> *Susanna and the Elders* depicts the biblical story of a blameless young wife bathing alone in her garden as two lustful older men secretly look on and try to entrap her into having sex with them.

dynamics of the gaze (ibid. p. 40). Campion, Goldbacher and Webber are all actively engaged in showing us eroticism, desire and agency through the eyes of Ada, Rosina and Griet, and I would also add that the way each director makes fabrics and costume such an important part of the narrative and screen space is another non-patriarchal cinematic viewpoint. For example, Bruzzi applauds Campion for her innovative use of a language of clothes that overturns the concept of restrictive Victorian dress to present it as a means of liberation rather than constraint (1995, p. 286). In turn, Street commends Bruzzi for her studies of *The Piano* in which she creates a discrete language and meaning for the study of film costume, and for establishing the potency of the erotic female gaze at the male form (2002, p. 12).

When it comes to understanding representations of textiles on screen, Hollander proposes that the cinema audience who sit expectantly before a lavish expanse of curtains waiting for ‘magic and myth ... luxury and excess’ are predisposed to understand that the function of textiles is to reveal meaning (1993, p. 81). Hollander explains that moviegoers suspend disbelief in the same way as their ancestors, for example, who viewed paintings and sculpture that showed deities separated from the mortal world by great swathes of dramatic fabrics, which was a tradition first established in places of worship. Then, the fine woven cloths that separated the priests from the laity, were regarded as a visual manifestation of the boundary between earthly and heavenly matters, and also evoked notions of sacred mystery and the promise of a better life to come.

In addition to Hollander's extensive studies of textiles in fine art, I would like to add that the line of washing has also appeared in works of art through the centuries, introducing a sense of movement, scale and information about the minutiae of everyday life, in precious illuminated manuscripts, on wall frescos, in paintings and photographic prints from the medieval Limburg Brothers to Annie Liebovitz in the present day.

Other observations about the treatment of drapery in art brings new layers of information useful to the study of textiles in cinema. The painter George W. Rhead maintains it 'would be difficult to overstate [its] value and importance' and questions why it has not been the subject of more study for its ability to add splendour, texture and movement to any given scene (1904, pp. 3-4). Briony Fer argues that whilst drapery hides and covers the body, it also functions like a second skin to draw erotic attention to the body's sensual curves and crevices (1998, pp.10-13). Gen Doy's study of drapery in modern visual culture demonstrates how notions of revelation and wisdom once evoked by folds, veils and drapes in classical art have been replaced in recent times as bleaker symbols of deprivation, violence and destruction (2002, pp. 139, 214).

### **The Uncanny and the line of washing in cinema**

Mary Ann Doane's discussion of the gaze at the interface of the interior and exterior of the home in the 'woman's film' leads her to consider the symbolism of the frequent portrayal of women waiting by or looking through windows in relation to Freud's theory of The Uncanny (1984, pp. 286-287). Freud's interest in the Uncanny, or in German *unheimlich*, originated from a moment of surprise when he did not recognize himself in a



mirror that he connects to a childhood fear of losing his eyes to The Sandman.<sup>6</sup> The Uncanny considers the notion of what is familiar but also secret, concealed or hidden from sight in the home, and consequently the sensation of something familiar suddenly becoming unfamiliar, unnerving and threatening. Freud then develops the opposing notions of the familiar and strange in relation to male and female, the male as a familiar and complete body, and the female as the uncannily unfamiliar body in its lack of male genitalia, thus evoking in the male a fear of castration (1958, p. 131).

Doane's examination of the 'woman at the window' (1984, p. 289) leads me to recognize that the line of washing in cinema, which frequently acts to show the limits of a woman's space within the grounds of her home, also marks a formal boundary between the familiar and the unknown. In her major study on society's obsession with cleanliness, the anthropologist Mary Douglas similarly observes displays of cleaning and washing around the borders of houses as a visible statement of the home as a place of safety and purity (1966, p. 68).

The line of washing reflects notions of The Uncanny in displays that frequently reveal what is usually kept hidden. Intimate items, kept close to the body are put out in the open for all to see and conspicuous differences between male and female garments are often

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<sup>6</sup> Hoffman's *Der Sandman* was a sinister character who threw sand in the eyes of sleepless children, causing their eyes to fall out. The Sandman would then collect those eyes and feed them to his own brood of children.

clearly identifiable. Clothes and linens hung out to dry may evoke distinctly personal and private associations, memories and emotions. Shame, in particular, evokes a strong response. For example, in *Clotheslines* one woman recalls how she would always take in the washing before her husband got home because he perceived it as a slur on his status (Andreadis, 1986 p. 380) and in *The Loneliest Runner* (dir. Michael Landon, 1976) a mother insensitively tries to stop her teenage son's bedwetting problem by putting his stained sheets out daily for all to see. I would also add that sheets fulfil another uncanny function in dramas of life and death because they are routinely the fabric upon which our most intense and vulnerable experiences occur: giving birth or being born, sleeping and dreaming, having sex, being unwell and ultimately dying, and thus carry the impressions of warmth, tenderness and sensuality, or the chill of loneliness, pain, distress and grief. Consequently, in many instances in cinema where sheets are seen hanging on a line, it is tempting to warn that, as with the appearance of oranges<sup>7</sup> in *The Godfather* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) that indicate imminent death or violence, the washing line is also a harbinger of doom. For example, in *On the Waterfront* (dir. Elia Kazan, 1954) when Terry (Marlon Brandon) unwittingly lures a neighbour to his death, the men shout to each other through lines of washing; and in *Ida* (dir. Pawel Pawlikowski, 2013) two women

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<sup>7</sup> Said to have started as a ploy to brighten an otherwise somber set through the introduction of bright colour, oranges subsequently were used purposefully to indicate that the character most closely placed to the fruit is going to die or suffer a violent attack.

[http://www.destinationhollywood.co/movies/godfather/feature\\_oranges.shtml](http://www.destinationhollywood.co/movies/godfather/feature_oranges.shtml)

[Accessed 08.01.17]

visiting a farm in search of the truth about the fate of the Jewish family who used to live there, stand under a line of sheets that flap violently overhead as if to shoo them away.

Empty clothes and linens on a line of washing in the open air may either be full of movement and disconcertingly 'alive' in the wind or alternatively will hang limply or lifelessly when it is wet or still. The phenomenon of empty clothes and their associations are considered, for example, by Erasmus as 'the body's body' for their ability to 'infer the state of a man's character' (1990, p. 108); by Wilson who finds 'something eerie' and uncanny about old gowns displayed in a costume museum and the sight of discarded clothes giving her the unnerving sensation 'as if a snake had shed its skin' (1985, pp.1-2); and whilst Bruzzi finds fault with Barthes' statement that 'the empty garment, without head and without limbs ... is death, not the neutral absence of the body, but the body mutilated, decapitated' (1972, p. 107) for denying clothing without a body any meaning of its own, his idea nevertheless continues to draw attention to the unnerving quality of bodiless clothes.

Jones and Stallybrass examine the transmission of memory through Renaissance clothing in what they refer to as the 'circulation of material ghosts' when clothes often outlasted their wearers and were bequeathed and worn by their living heirs, passing on memories and keeping their identities alive (2012, pp. 203-4). The more ancient image of the Greek

Moirai, or the three goddesses of Fate,<sup>8</sup> who spun, wove and cut the fabric of life, are also a reminder of a deep-rooted sense of the foreseeability of death associated with textiles, and thus makes it possible to recognize that cloth and clothing have always been associated with a sense of mortality.

### **Evaluation of Findings**

This study opens with the observation that positive thoughts of wholesomeness and innocence evoked by clothes and linens blowing on a line derived from a happy childhood memory were in stark contrast to the frequent appearance in cinema of the clotheslines as a site of conflict. The juxtaposition is effective because it situates goodness and purity on one side of a dividing line and positions unsettling forces on the other side that seek to disrupt its peace and harmony. Lines of washing may sometimes be used to represent spaces of accord and friendship, for example, in tight-knit communities and places where women can meet and exchange ideas, but more often the clothesline draws up a metaphorical line in space at which opposing concepts meet such as tame vs. wild, pride vs. shame, truth vs. lies, and safety vs. danger to produce tense situations where arguments and hostilities are inevitable. Freud's notion of the familiar made strange and threatening thus supports the sense of anxiety caused around the line of washing in cinema as those outside its territory attempt to disturb or destroy what lies

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<sup>8</sup> Clotho the spinner, Lachesis the measurer and Atropos the cutter of thread were all thought to control human destiny and lifespan.

within. It also occurs to me that the shock experienced at the sight of a blood-splattered sheet on a clothesline (see Figs. 16 and 17) is connected to the male fear of body difference that evokes a fear of castration in Freud's definition of The Uncanny (p. 20). The Uncanny also helps to make sense of the clothes and linens that feature on and around the line that evoke memories, either of the person who owns them or of previous events when the item was worn or used, so that negative sensations of unease and aversion may be experienced instead of more positive recollections. For example, as mentioned earlier, the mother in *The Loneliest Runner* makes a public show of her son's soiled sheets to 'cure' his bedwetting problem. Additionally, in a brisk breeze or in the pouring rain, items on a washing line can appear either to be in the full swing of life or eerily lifeless; dead or alive. Thus, the clotheslines and its contents – the clothes and linens that enfold us from the cradle to the grave - are carriers of information that evoke memories and impressions of life and death, and thus I propose that the sight of a line of washing in cinema, when not offering a feel-good factor, almost always represents a matter of deathly concern.

To a certain extent, Rhead's regret that the importance and value of drapery in art had received scant attention by others writing about art over one hundred years ago, forewarns me that writings about textiles in film may also be scarce. With the notable exceptions of Cocteau's dedicated diary entries about the making of *La Belle et la Bête*, several scholarly articles on Cantow's *Clotheslines* and French's important observation of the feminine space defined by the washing line in *An Angel at My Table*, the dearth of information about the line of washing and its textiles urges me to seek for wider

recognition and discussion of the subject. However, Hollander and Doy's studies have refocused attention on the power of fabrics to add splendour, texture and movement to a composition and to notice how folds, veils and drapes are used as metaphors to reveal notions of perception, revelation and understanding. Hollander also argues that cinema audiences, who wait in eager anticipation in the dark for lavish curtains to unveil the magic of the screen, are thus naturally inclined towards an understanding of the symbolic power of textiles to reveal meaning. Hollander's idea that a knowledge of fine art trains the eye to interpret meaning in textiles is also exemplified in Keyssar's appreciation of Cantow's *Clotheslines* who is reminded for the duration of the film of work by artists such as Rothko and Vermeer. By contrast, Andreadis's view that sees only random, poorly-edited clips failing to build towards either an interesting thesis or a lyrical composition serves as a reminder to ensure that cohesiveness, poetry and momentum underpin my own work.

Although Bruzzi is commended for bringing new language and meaning to the study of film costume and for establishing, she also reminds us of the 'Delilah-like' power of costumes to cause a malfunction in usually-rigorous academic analysis (1997, p. 36). Barthes' thwarted attempts to pin down meaning in women's fashion meet with a measure of resolution in Bruzzi's proposal to understand costume by revelling in its complexities and to find value in discussion and deliberation rather than fixed answers. It is thus appropriate to remember that textiles production was once equated with wisdom, as illustrated in Filippo Picinelli's encyclopaedia of emblems *Mundus symbolicus* (1653). It shows weaving as a symbol of 'Prudentia,' foresight and sagacity,

with the accompanying motto '*sic scriptores ex mille aliquot particulis uniforme & cohaerens corpus [formant].*' Roughly translated, this means that from a thousand multi-coloured, criss-crossing threads, the scholarly mind is able to produce a coherent body of knowledge.

## **The practice-led aspect of the PhD: the ideas, processes, influences and inspirations behind the films**

At the outset of this practice-led research, it was my intention to validate and inform my film practice through the close study of textiles and the line of washing in cinema. In my film work, it was my aim to encourage viewers to think about a subject that is easily-overlooked, and further, to reflect on the way textiles evoke memories and reveal emotions. In particular, I wanted to share my interest in the way a beautiful, uplifting line of washing may also attract negative associations and correlations. It was also my aim to achieve a standard of work that would secure regular selection in galleries and exhibitions and that would attract a few regular followers. A proposal to Galeri Caernarfon to show a collection of short films resulting from the research led to the exhibition *Reading Between the Lines* which offered the opportunity to show the works together for the first time.

The earliest works in the show, *Gellifor* and *My Place*, were made towards the end of my M.A. in Fine Art at Glyndwr University under the tutelage of Dr. Karen Heald, and are included as the films that inspired me to think that there was much to be uncovered in the further, detailed study of washing and textiles. At the time, I was unaware of the way I had serendipitously used the drying sheets as theatrical curtains to frame the scene in *Gellifor* – something I would later come to understand better through a study of the lines of washing in *Beauty and The Beast* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. Nor did I know that by including a contrast of comforting and disconcerting noises in the soundscape of *My*



*Place* that I was instinctively touching on an area frequently seen and heard in cinema where danger is never very far away from the line of washing.

Although I lacked clarity about the way forward, the urge to keep working with video was intense; questions about clotheslines and textiles were starting to take shape and demand attention; and as I started to take serious notice of the frequent appearance of washing lines in cinema, this too commanded further consideration. Equipped with a book of images collected from movies and television, together with a nascent assortment of ideas about clotheslines, I pitched a PhD proposal to Nathan Abrams and Llion Iwan at Bangor University, who fortunately saw its potential and agreed to co-supervise the work.

### **Information about U.S. washing line bans and communications with Directors confirm that washing lines represent trouble**

The outset of this study in 2009 coincided with a major David Hockney retrospective and in one interview he fondly recalled a semi-comic statement made by his Bradford-based mother when she visited him in California. ‘It’s strange’ she said ‘all this lovely weather and yet you never see any washing out’ (Adams 2009). Whilst not oblivious to some of the negative attitudes towards clotheslines that have recently crept into tenancy agreements and gentrified neighbourhoods in the UK, some research on Mrs. Hockney’s remark uncovered the surprising fact of widespread clothesline bans in the USA.

Ostensibly prohibited for aesthetic reasons, but largely about property values, over the last thirty years or so homeowner associations have been responsible for imposing restrictions and bans on clothes drying on approximately sixty million Americans

(Project Laundry List 2016). Organized resistance to the bans has been growing, resulting in Right to Dry laws, such as one enacted in California in 2015, that have allowed individuals to support energy conservation initiatives and to exercise freedom of choice.

I made a few early attempts to talk directly or by email to directors or others involved in featuring interesting washing line sequences on screen. Many requests for information fell on stony ground but an email from Pedro Almodovar's assistant thanking me for my interest but regretting that he was too busy to discuss the washing lines in *Volver* (2006) was thrilling nevertheless. However, one of the best responses came from a telephone interview I conducted with Antony Byrne who directed a two-episode drama entitled *The Stolen Child* (2009) for the Irish drama series *Single Handed* about a two-year old boy who is abducted from a traveller family. The opening scene is a beautiful, one-minute study of a washing line, first seen from a distance but then zooms in to show a young woman on a hillside hanging out a large red quilt and other bedding in a high wind. A shot from inside the house, where a little boy plays on the floor, looks out through a window to give us another view of the woman at her line. Byrne talked very openly about all aspects of the washing line, from the practicalities to some of the wider issues involved. The first attempt at putting up the line of washing was not at all to Byrne's liking, and he complained of an attitude prevalent in television production along the lines of 'Who cares? We don't have any ties – let's just shoot this and get onto the next thing.' Items had been thrown up without much care or thought, and the line 'as well was sagging ... wasn't even near her eye line.' So, everything went back in the prop truck and they borrowed better items from the owner of the house where the scene was set. He

chose to use fishing wire instead of the usual polyurethane cable to make the line lighter, thereby giving the hanging items more movement. For this scene, Byrne also chose to position himself by the camera, instead of the monitor where he would normally be, in order to be close enough to manipulate the line himself as and when necessary. He said that he had a lot of fun ‘with those kind of things’ and ‘the DP was big into it as well because it’s a cinematic thing.’ The filming was done in ‘the wild West of Ireland’ which made the director think of memorable washing line images in Westerns. However, he had to stand his ground with the Executive Producer who felt that washing lines in an Irish drama featuring travellers would get ‘loads of complaints’ and who wanted the woman doing something else like gardening. His view was that he needed the line of washing for the story - to show that the woman was trying to be a good and caring mum, plus he liked its aesthetics and cinematic effect (Byrne 2009).

Additionally, Byrne had the same problem when he was making an adaptation of an Edna O’Brien love story set in County Clare called *Wild Decembers* (dir. Anthony Byrne, 2009). He filmed another detailed washing line scene but was exasperated to discover that he was facing opposition again when he was told ‘Oh my God. We’ve got the Same Exec Producer – you’re going to have a phone call now when she sees the rushes – and she’ll be saying could we not have had her doing something else?’ We also discussed the clotheslines that feature in ‘the Projects’ (public housing) in the U.S. series *The Wire*, and Byrne suggested that washing lines are a useful device for breaking up the monotony of brick walls and for introducing an element of movement into otherwise static scenes.

Another Irish washing connection came from Richard Clark, who directed Episode 3, Series 2 of *Life on Mars* (2007) about a suspected IRA bombing campaign in Manchester. Washing lines hang in the spaces between terraced houses and in the back alleys, reminiscent of the washing line scene in *Get Carter*. Clark says ‘I was keen to convey a sense of an Irish community ... and the feminine domesticity that the washing line suggests was a shorthand for that. It was also meant to make the police actions feel more invasive. I had intended a shot in which Gene drives down a back alley through lines of laundry but sadly we ran out of time’ (Clark 2009). By contrast, my interest in one of the shots of the opening credits in *Coronation Street* that shows a few items hung on a line in the back yard of one of the houses was met with a terse reply. ‘We really can’t help you. It’s simply set dressing. There’s no thought in it at all and there’s no ulterior motive. It’s just a typical back yard scene. The lines were there and we just used them. It’s just the back of houses’ (Nugent, 2009). It was probably a coincidence, but soon after this conversation the opening credits were updated, but this time no washing lines were to be seen. I find it a bit of a shame that a soap opera, a type of drama named for being sponsored by soap manufacturers in the past, should be so wary or simply unaware of honouring what could be regarded as a symbol of its origins as a normal working-class neighbourhood.

The impact of the pros and cons of clothesline bans, or of executive decisions to rid the screen of washing lines, was to fully expose the fact that washing lines divide opinion and people about what is desirable visually, socially and economically. This sense of division and dispute seemed to tally with the idea emerging from my early observations

of clotheslines in cinema that these, too, were about characters on opposite sides of a line battling out their stances and ideals. Through an interactive process of making and studying film I hoped to unravel some of the issues that are laid bare in the open display of clotheslines and their textiles and to uncover how clothes and linens enhance our appreciation and understanding of film.

To avoid too wide a remit or a 'laundry list' I was encouraged to consider a small selection of films that would give the study focus and depth. The first choice was based on a desire to understand more about the extraordinary use of textiles in *The Governess*, which appear to fill more screen space than usual in a film with sumptuous colour, texture and semiotic meaning; Goldbacher's citing of *The Piano* as inspiration for her film led me to become interested in Campions's use of tight costume and shadowy linens; and the final choice of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* was made for its recurring images of cleanliness and washing lines.

The study of these three works became more and more rewarding as many common themes and influences were revealed, thus creating the opportunity for thoughts and ideas to interplay and develop in a way that would not have occurred with any other combined selection of films.

### **Creating parameters for reflective practice during the PhD**

For the purpose of developing the quality and scope of my practice, I felt it important to become involved with organizations that would offer opportunities to share ideas, skills,

constructive criticism and exhibition opportunities with other artists and practitioners. (Please see list of venues and work shown in the table below). In 2010 the Cardiff Women's Arts Association awarded me a series of Digital Artist Masterclasses in a project entitled 'The Unseen and Unspoken' with artist Jackie Chettur, designed to help women artists access areas of technical expertise in a supportive environment and to facilitate networking experiences. The project culminated in a joint exhibition of the artists involved, and since then I have continued to exhibit with the WAA on an annual basis. I applied to join Fibre Art Wales, a group that aims to raise the profile of Welsh contemporary fibre art, achieving full membership in 2013, and meeting and exhibiting with the group regularly (see exhibitions list below). Over the last five years, I have also volunteered on a weekly basis with Tape Music and Film, a community arts charity based in Colwyn Bay, mostly making films with groups of people recovering from substance abuse. Another on-going project, started in 2012, are daily photographs I take of my own or other people's washing which I use to develop ideas and themes for my film work, and which I post on social media to elicit comments and responses from artists and others. For example, the idea for *Words on the line* came from photographs where clothing labels were very prominent. One label in particular, seemed to loll out of the neck of a t-shirt like a tongue, giving me the idea to replace brand labels with replacements that 'spoke' one or two words about the nature of individual items on the line. Studies of washing reflected in a black door that make the items appear ghostly and more disembodied than usual also prompted me to unravel the idea of clothes as eerie and disconcerting, as in the work *Bad Line*.

## **Artist Filmmaker Influences**

The work of the Orcadian film-poet Margaret Tait (1918-1999), and of Dalziel and Scullion and Lisa O'Brien, has inspired and sustained my practice throughout this study. Whenever I have felt stuck or frustrated with my progress, a reflection on Margaret Tait's steadfastness in making film her own way and on her own terms has got me back on track. As an artist who comes from a family of high-achieving medics, it is important to me that Tait, who was originally a doctor, found a stronger urge to become a filmmaker and poet. Having served in The Royal Army Medical Corps during the 1940s, Tait used her earnings as a locum and a small gratuity from her war work to 'forge her own entry into the filmmaking trade' (Wakefield, 2015). Tait studied in Rome at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, then returned to Scotland with a strong sense of wanting to make films about her own people and country, founding Ancona Films in Edinburgh with a fellow-student in the mid-1950s. A decade later Tait moved back to Orkney where she developed a way of working that would now be regarded as the essence of feminist film practice, using her camera like a diary to record personal, intimate moments of everyday life in films based on the culture and landscape of home. Rejecting the backing of the Films of Scotland committee whose guidelines she felt too limiting, Tait worked with what she simply described as 'persistence' (Todd, 1999) over a period of nearly fifty years, making thirty-two independent, experimental short films and one feature, twenty-nine of which were self-financed for her to 'retain her artistic probity and vision' (Grigor, 1999). Tait took responsibility for all aspects of her 'self-made films' (Wakefield 2015) completing all the editing and sound work in her small studio before sending the reels off to London for processing with detailed, scientific notes

and instructions. Tait also preferred to arrange each film's distribution or screening herself for people she 'would *like* to like [them]' (ibid.).

Tait describes finding an expression by the Spanish poet Lorca about 'stalking the image' to explain her inspiration for using the camera to 'really peer at things,' and of 'breathing' with the camera as she literally tracked the subjects that interested her (Krikorian, 2003 p. 103). For example, in *Orquil Burn* (1955) Tait traces a little stream from a waterfall by the sea back to its inland source, and in *Rose Street* (1956), she makes a careful study of all the comings and goings on a busy Edinburgh back street, including a shot of a man delivering coal who turns out to be a young Sean Connery. David Curtis describes Tait's work as having 'a clarity of vision and a simplicity – almost naiveté – of technique: shots held 'too long'; hand-held camera not always perfectly still or level; frequent and abrupt in-camera edits, and a fondness for simple, intimate subject matter' (1999). Inspired by the poets Emily Dickinson, Lorca, Lowry, MacDiarmid, Pound, Rilke and Rimbaud (Scottish Poetry Library, 2016) Tait's belief in film as 'essentially a poetic medium' (Tait, 1997) saw her 'gathering images by a process of accumulation, filming intermittent moments and events observed over protracted periods of time' (Reynolds 2004 p. 68) that gave many of her works the 'appearance of a still life – albeit a fluid composition' (Wakefield, 2015). In *The Look of the Place*, for example, the earliest scenes were shot in 1969, the last in 1976 and finally the dubbing and printing were completed in 1981.



Tait inspires me to have faith in my own simple, self-sufficient methods of filmmaking. On most aspects of the work, except for the musical input, I tend to work alone. Like Tait, I like to build film ideas by a process of working little and often but then I also have spontaneous bursts of more intense activity, usually when I see something particularly inspiring in the landscape or when the weather conditions are right to set up a clothesline arrangement in another location. I always keep my DV Panasonic to hand on a tripod to capture, for example, good cloud formations, shadows, birds and washing on the line; and I also do the same for audio, collecting samples of rainfall, birdsong and voices on a Zoom recorder. I love the editing process, finding it equally as creative as filming, and it is not unusual for my dreams to feature Final Cut timelines!

I have also turned to the work of the collaborative practitioners Dalziel and Scullion on the east coast of Scotland and Lisa O'Brien in the west of Scotland for a more current, and perhaps more realistic view of filmmakers who have developed their practice in the further reaches of the UK. Matthew Dalziel and Louise Scullion are Scottish artists and lecturers at The Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee, who use a range of media including video to explore the environmental balance between humans and nature in works such as *Source* (2007) and *Speaking the Land* (2010). Lisa O'Brien in Wester Ross, teaches with The Open University, The Open College of the Arts and The University of the Highlands and Islands, and uses video, sound, and more recently drawing and print to make work about duration, space and the experience of time passing in works such as *Single Track Road* (2006) and *Swing* (2007). Dalziel and Scullion's soundscapes and Lisa O'Brien's have also had a strong influence on my own use of bird

calls, weather effects, and diegetic sound such as the radio playing or music practice.

Sharon Bell's essay 'The Academic Mode of Production' contains a memorable description of the problems of balancing practice-led research and academic interests as 'a marriage of inconvenience.' An anthropologist turned filmmaker, like Jane Campion, but working in academia in Australia, Bell is wary of an academic system that inadvertently 'give[s] priority to that which is measurable' and instead is attracted to the way artists are involved in a life-long practice of reflecting on their own and other's work, that resists definite conclusions but instead leads towards a search for new possibilities and questions (2009). I have been fortunate to be able to learn about practice-led dissertations as a methodology through meetings and seminars with Karen Heald who completed her practice-led PhD study on '*Dream Films*' in 2014. Additionally, Rachel Garfield's case study 'Articulating a position through research: The practice-led PhD' (2007) provides a particularly useful and inspirational description of the process of making which interplays with 'unorthodox routes and uses of theory' to create 'profound theoretical breakthroughs' and for its beautifully-crafted film descriptions. Candid observations of the supervision process and tips about the writing-up process and Viva Voce are a generous gift to the candidate at each stage of the journey.

### **Explaining the films in more detail**

*Gellifor* was made in the village of Gellifor in Denbighshire, North Wales, where the filmmaker's husband grew up. It records a brief, half-remembered event when two unexpected visitors get up to mischief around some drying sheets on an idyllic summer's

day. *My Place* celebrates the simple pleasure of doing the laundry inside and out. Connections are made with the natural world - to clouds, birds, winds and tides - but there is also the sense of being linked to the wider world via the sounds of the radio and a plane overhead. The collage of images and audio reflects the daily experience of an interplay between the contemplative and creative states of homemaker and filmmaker.

On one level, *Hattie's Line* is a study of a beautiful day seen through the threads and patterns of beautiful, inherited linens, but on another level, it is a very personal piece of work about family and loss. Hattie and I are cousins, and our mothers are sisters, now in their late eighties. The cloths swinging in the breeze would have belonged to their mother and perhaps even their grandmother. I am certain that they would all have taken meals at a table covered in some of these fabrics. Like many other daughters, we become the custodians of precious, old family linens that have little practical value but hold a store of memories. The film opens with the voice of a young girl, my niece Elizabeth, saying 'Auntie Hattie, I might be here a while.' Although Elizabeth means she may be in the field a while, I also understood it in broader terms to mean that she would be staying with Hattie for good after the recent long illness and death of her mother. Thus, as I film Elizabeth and my daughter playing around the drying linens, new memories are made that connect the next generation to their lineage by way of the cloths.

A year later, I returned to Hattie's line to make *Night Dresses*, based on passages from Margaret Atwood's book *Alias Grace* (1997) in which lines of ghostly nightwear presage a murder as they flap in the garden, or hover eerily in the attic of a big house.

(Margaret Atwood's office had given me permission to make a piece of work around some agreed passages for the purposes of this study). In the book, the nightgowns are described 'like large white birds, or angels rejoicing, although without any heads' that took on a different appearance indoors when they became 'like pale ghosts of themselves hovering and shimmering there in the gloom; and the look of them, so silent and bodiless, made me afraid.' Other clothes appear as 'if worn by invisible swelling hips; as if alive' (Atwood 1997, pp. 184, 226). I borrowed four long white night dresses from Hattie and filmed them so that their hems dragged on the ground as if they were being worn, then lifted the line a little so that the garments could sway or seem to breathe in the breeze. As night fell, Elizabeth and Olivia, my daughter, found lanterns and played around the line, soon asking if they could wear the night dresses. Stirred by the girls' excitement, I started to veer away from a direct translation of the text, especially when Hattie told me that she had kept the night dress with the pink ribbon in remembrance of her sister Katherine, our niece's mother who had died two years earlier, as it had been the last thing she had worn. Whilst bearing Atwood's imagery in mind, I was also reminded of the superstition that drying clothes should not be left out over-night as the spirits will possess them. With a little direction and a lot of improvisation, I filmed the girls and Hattie until the light faded completely. The music that accompanies the film was made by musician Chris Richards after he had seen some clips and understood the back story, hitting just the right note of strangeness and eeriness that was required.

My preferred way of showing *Night Dresses* is by projecting the film onto a neatly-stacked pile of my own collection of inherited linens, and *Gellifor* has been projected

onto an arrangement of hanging sheets to emphasize the sense of textiles that hold memories, if not exactly the spirits of wandering souls.

*Wavering* continues the idea of fabrics and memories, this time in a more public place and in the form of a large line of bunting strung along the promenade to attract visitors to a May-day gala. For some reason, it was not taken down, and left to the elements it broke, frayed and eventually blew away in the autumn months. A looping line of flags has an aspect of the line of washing about it, in its variety of colour and repeating forms, but what really inspired me was the contrast of gaiety and wild fluttering on days when the weather was rough and the promenade was empty of visitors and promise. On brighter days, the shadows cast by the flags were particularly striking and seemed to suggest even more strongly the gap between presence and absence. Filming was done over weeks and months, with the bunting becoming more distressed and tattered. Using a new, separate recorder for sound, I became very aware of the constant noise of the busy road nearby which intruded on the lovely natural sounds of the sea, birds and fluttering flags. Wind baffle was a continual problem, but I was pleased to catch the snatches of conversation that hang disembodied in the air and that resonate with the idea of the traces that remain of earlier visitors and bunting. The film's music track was not made especially for the film but was given to me by musician Gerry Carter who understands my ideas and lets me select compositions from a wide catalogue of his work. Soon after making the film, the old man and his dog featured passed away, which brings about a more personal sense of transience and loss. When *Wavering* was shown in Cardiff, a fellow-exhibitor, Julia Thomas, wrote me the following note:

By the way, when I was last in BHAC [Butetown History & Arts Centre], one of the volunteers was watching your films and especially the shadows of the flags. She said how wonderful it was that artists like you help to draw such often-overlooked things to our attention. I explained a bit about your work (as best I could) and directed her to the article in there (Lucy Wright, <http://lewright.wordpress.com/2011/04/04/the-unseen-and-the-unspoken-jenni-steele>).

*Memory Drawer* and *I Nearly Fainted* originated from audio recordings inspired by the voices of women describing their laundry experiences in Roberta Cantow's documentary film *Clotheslines*, that I then developed into films. The voice in *Storm* describes the experience of filming the washing caught in the rain and lightning. In *Memory Drawer* memories come tumbling out of a drawer containing old clothes that belonged to the artist's aunt and mother. *I Nearly Fainted* is a quote taken from a conversation between two friends in which they discuss the best ways to hang out laundry.

Some elements of the textiles and washing lines in the three movies under study have had a direct and literal influence on the development of certain ideas, whilst others have seeped into my work in a subtler, oblique way. For example, the many shadowy images in *The Piano* inspired the portrayal of a day's laundry duties told through the shadows they cast in *Shadow play*. The music in the film is a recording of my daughter playing the harp, and the shadows are mine, in homage to the mother-daughter relationship in *The Piano*. The drenched washing in *The Piano*'s axe scene also led me towards the study of

rain-soaked laundry in *Melancholy* and *Storm*. Bill Viola's 2002 work *Observance* on show in The Walker Gallery, Liverpool, in 2013, was presented on a screen made to look like a full-length mirror with the intention of provoking self-reflection. An experiment to emulate this effect to see if I could intensify the sense of desolation in the wet-through washing in *Melancholy* was only partly successful. Tipping my camera through forty-five degrees for filming was the easy bit – showing it on most screen results in unwanted cropping, and sideways projection is not as straightforward as I had hoped.

In *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the scene in which Van Ruijven assaults Griet, when he grabs her by the throat and heaps insults and innuendo on her, led me to see how the clothesline is an irresistible target for others to denounce or attack a person who displays an overt sign of goodness and purity. *Words on the line* was the first attempt to get some of the vocabulary about washing out in the open, and are made explicit by placing words over existing clothing labels and on clothes pegs to describe some of the other things that may be felt or noticed when clothes are put out in the open for all to see. (In order of appearance, translations of the Welsh words are: chore, daily, new, personal, stain, worn out, delicate, much too expensive, family values, care, good housewife, scruffy, private, embarrassing, high standards, pride, work shirt, love, favourite). *Bad Line* develops along darker lines, using the reflections of disembodied shirts and sheets, which are given distorted voices that make harsh pronouncements, including some that make particular reference to the soiled sheets in *The Loneliest Runner*.

The idea behind *Pinnies* comes from archaeologist Elizabeth Wayland Barber's research on the Bronze Age Egtved skirt – a mysteriously short, string skirt, now thought to have been created to attract attention to the area it covered. It occurred to me that my collection of gaudily-patterned vintage pinnies and aprons could have a new lease of life as modern-day Egtved skirts, hence the gaiety of the distinctive soundtrack and the peeling away of layers of fabrics to reveal what lies beneath each one. The contrasting images of the pinnies on the line and of them being carefully ironed and folded are intended to evoke the possibility of two existences – one which involves dancing a can-can on the breeze and the other that is bound to domestic chores.

Because of the nature of trying to follow the flow of Stephanie Norgate's poem, *Trevaill* is a less personal work than usual and additionally reflects a more formal way of working where aspects of keeping to script, location and order of shots was necessary. It was an interesting exercise getting the required permissions from poet and publisher, but on reflection I think the film would have worked better had I not felt a self-imposed responsibility to make a literal word-for-picture interpretation. A seminar at Bangor University led by Jan Harlan, Executive Producer for many of Stanley Kubrick's films, then inspired me to make *Cut Up* that was to be edited to the rhythm and flow of a music score, preferably a waltz like *The Blue Danube* in *2001*, rather than tacking on the sound *after* the film edit which is most often the case. After a lot of listening, I chose Chopin's waltz No. 19 in A minor, which was arranged for the film by musician Lucasz Kusmirek. The film also uses a faithful reconstruction of the lines designed by Cocteau for *Beauty and The Beast* and pays homage to his dramatic use of shadows to make a sequence



inspired by a blend of *The Piano*'s Bluebeard shadow play and Freud's childhood fear of The Sandman.

Family, friends and colleagues have been eager to let me know when they have spotted interesting lines of washing in movies, sending me links and ideas of their own to add to my collection. In time, it became clear that such an eclectic range of material demanded to be seen in the form of a compilation film: *Reading Between the Lines*. As the assembling process progressed, it became clear, for example, that clotheslines are frequently used to signal a nostalgic view of the past where rows of washing represent the presence of a tight-knit, poor-but-decent community. However, I soon noticed something much more surprising happening around the line of washing – a large occurrence of violence, murder and mayhem! (See p. 22).

#### **List of previous showings of the films**

<u>Film Title</u>	<u>Date made</u>	<u>Showings</u>
<i>Gellifor</i>	2008	Oriel 103, Glyndwr University, MA show, Feb/09.
<i>My Place</i>	2009	Mold Art Fair, Jul/2014 Oriel Myrddin, Carmarthen Film Open, Apr/09; Glynn Vivian Gallery, Swansea, Ffilm 2, Jan/11

<i>Hattie's Line</i>	2010	Butetown History & Arts Centre, Cardiff in 'Unseen & Unspoken' with Women's Arts Association, Mar/12; The National Eisteddfod of Wales, Vale of Glamorgan, Fibre Arts Wales Showcase, Aug/12.
<i>Nightdresses</i>	2012	Butetown History & Arts Centre, Cardiff in 'Unseen & Unspoken' with Women's Arts Association, Mar/12; Craft In The Bay, Cardiff, in 'A Personal Perspective,' Mar/13; The National Eisteddfod of Wales, Vale of Glamorgan, Fibre Arts Wales Showcase, Aug/12
<i>Wavering</i>	2012	Butetown History & Arts Centre, Cardiff in 'Unseen & Unspoken' with Women's Arts Association, Mar/12; The National Eisteddfod of Wales, Vale of Glamorgan, Fibre Arts Wales Showcase, Aug/12
<i>I Nearly Fainted</i>	2012	Storiell, Bangor in 'Conversations and Dialogues' with Fibre Art Wales, Nov/11
<i>Storm</i>	2012	Storiell, Bangor in 'Conversations and Dialogues' with Fibre Art Wales, Nov/11
<i>Memory Drawer</i>	2012	Butetown History & Arts Centre, Cardiff, in 'Picking up the Thread,'

		Women's Arts Association Open Nov/15; Storiel, Bangor in 'Conversations and Dialogues' with Fibre Art Wales, Nov/11
<i>Shadow Play</i>	2012	Storiel, Bangor Open, Mar/13
<i>Words on the Line</i>	2012	The Quilters' Guild, York, May/13, in 'Dialogues' with Fibre Art Wales; The National Eisteddfod of Wales, Vale of Glamorgan, Fibre Arts Wales Showcase, Aug/12
<i>Melancholy</i>	2014	Galeri, Caernarfon, 'Fibre in Focus' exhibition with Fibre Art Wales.
<i>Pinnies</i>	2014	Storiel, Bangor Open, March 2015; Butetown History & Arts Centre, Cardiff, With Women's Arts Association, March 2014
<i>Trevaill</i>	2015	Mold Art Fair, Sept 2016; Theatr Colwyn, Coastline Film Festival, Nov 2015; Craft In The Bay, Cardiff, 'Transience' exhibition with Fibre Art Wales, May 2015.
<i>Cut Up</i>	2016	Not previously exhibited
<i>Bad Line</i>	2016	Not previously exhibited
<i>Reading Between the Lines</i>	2016	Not previously exhibited

## Conclusion

At the outset, I found it very difficult to research, write, and make films concurrently. However, over time this has changed to become easier, and in fact necessary, for the combined processes to work as a reciprocal and mutually-sustaining system. The result of this has allowed, not only for the theory to support the practice, but for the practice to illuminate aspects of theory that would otherwise have remained elusive. My particular fondness for the line of washing allowed me to notice the apparent incongruity of the disconcertingly-troubled zone of the clothesline in cinema as opposed to the more heartening notions of domestic clotheslines and I have relished the opportunity to disentangle the threads of that conundrum through sustained practical research. The exhibition *Reading Between the Lines* at Galeri Caernarfon showcases the films made throughout this process, and marks a culmination of my endeavours to date. However, as Bell observes, practice-led research often resists definite outcomes, and manifests instead as a work in progress that offers the potential for new opportunities and questions to arise (2009). It is thus an exciting and inspiring opportunity to group the work together for the first time to discover what new connections it provokes through the observations of others and in my own response to its whole and constituent parts.

**Introduction to the three films under consideration: Jane Campion's *The Piano*, Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess* and Peter Webber's *Girl with a Pearl Earring***

Jane Campion wrote and directed *The Piano*, Sandra Goldbacher wrote and directed *The Governess*, citing *The Piano* as her inspiration (Kaufman, 1998) and Olivia Hetreed developed the screenplay for Peter Webber's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* from Tracy Chevalier's book of the same name. Campion, Goldbacher and Chevalier all acknowledge the Brontës as a major influence in their work, with Campion citing *Wuthering Heights* as her particular inspiration (Stone, 1993); Goldbacher refers to a love for the work of the Brontë sisters (Blackwelder, 1998) all of whom were employed at various times as governesses; and Chevalier names Charlotte Brontë as her heroine, who she thinks 'enjoyed playing the role of her most famous heroine,' Jane Eyre, who was 'poor, obscure, plain and little' (2016). Ada, Rosina and Griet are all poor and obscure, and Ada is also plain and little, although Rosina is tall and beautiful and Griet is poor and dresses plainly. In each film, we follow the progress of a creative female protagonist on a precarious journey of self-discovery, set in approximately the 1850s (*The Piano*), the 1830s (*The Governess*) and the 1660s (*Girl*). In a study of the 'woman's heritage film' Antje Aescheid identifies *The Governess* and *The Piano* amongst films such as *Titanic* and *Vanity Fair* made in the 'post chick flick/lit culture of the 1990s' which 'activate and seemingly reconcile often contradictory narrative trajectories within a pre-feminist historical setting to create postfeminist fantasies of romantic emancipation' (2006).

Furthermore, *The Piano*, *The Governess* and *Girl with A Pearl Earring* are all films that unfold notions of the active control of the gaze and the object of the look. Bruzzi notes

that *The Piano* ‘strips’ Stewart, the supposed head of the household, of his traditional power by refusing to align our look with his as the ‘on-screen voyeur’ (1997, p. 58); Rosina, *The Governess*, progresses her status from the subject of photographs to become the taker and maker of images as she works her way from one side of the lens to the other; and Griet, a powerless servant in a painter’s household, earns her place as the endlessly fascinating subject in Vermeer’s ‘Girl With A Pearl Earring’ (c. 1665) who gazes back steadily at the viewer.

### **Unravelling meaning in *The Piano*’s Shadow Play, Silences and Stares**

Set in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century *The Piano* is the story of Ada McGrath an elective mute, who travels with her young daughter, Flora (Anna Paquin), and her treasured piano to New Zealand in an arranged marriage. Ada’s new husband, Stewart (Sam Neill), is bewildered by his wife who communicates with him through sign language or written notes and shows little interest in him. Ada is sent to teach piano to an unrefined neighbour, Baines (Harvey Keitel), with whom she develops a surprising relationship.

Harriet Kimble Wrye finds that *The Piano* works ‘as a kind of Rorschach, inviting wildly different projections’ (1998, p. 169) such as the Freudian erotic, the female Gothic, sound and silence, feminine desire, mother-daughter relationships, the female gaze, and stirring costume analysis. Of particular interest to this study, Stella Bruzzi identifies the moment when Baines delicately outlines a hole in Ada’s woollen stocking as the starting point of her interest in the costumes in *The Piano* which lead her towards an examination of the unusually disruptive nature of the garments in *The Piano* that overturn common

assumptions surrounding the social and moral restrictions imposed on Victorian women and their clothing (1993, p. 235).

When Ada and Flora are settling into their new life in New Zealand, we see them in the relaxed and intimate setting of a bedroom, as the girl asks her mother to explain how she managed to speak to the man who was her father. Ada replies ‘I didn’t need to speak. I could lay thoughts out in his mind like they were a sheet.’ These words inspire my own Rorschach view which is one that seeks to show how Campion also lays out her thoughts in our minds using the sheets, cloth and clothes in *The Piano* to highlight Ada’s silence as a force of empowerment.

Campion’s film makes references to an eclectic mix of aesthetic and literary influences. Film journalist Helen Barlow notes that Campion found inspiration for her film in Huston’s *The African Queen* and Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1996). Kathleen McHugh’s finds Campion using the influences of the paintings and sculptures of Frida Khalo and Joseph Beuys respectively (2007, pp. 5-13) and the writings of Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson.

### ***The Piano and The African Queen***

Although Campion refers to *The African Queen* (dir. John Huston, 1951) as one of the films that inspired *The Piano* she does not elaborate on the subject, but mentions ‘looking at other people who had worked in epic forms’ to see ‘how they put together their vocabulary visually ... to work out how I could adapt that, use it, and make it personal to

Ada's story' (DVD, 1997). I suggest it is the use of clothing in *The African Queen* that is important to Campion, particularly in the way that Ada's outfits mirror Rose's as they become dirtied, looser and less formal as she finds herself falling for Baines. Wearing dramatically-contrasting costumes that indicate they are social opposites, *The Piano's* dour, tight-laced Ada and the sympathetic but surly Baines are initially as mismatched as *The African Queen's* prim missionary Rose and the rough but kind-hearted riverboat captain Charlie. Both men are shown to be comfortable amongst the people and challenging surroundings of their adopted countries, which is reflected in their loose, informal and often soiled clothing, whereas the women start out looking out of place and out of their element in tight, uncomfortable costumes that restrict their comfort and mobility. When Rose first boards Charlie's boat she is wearing a pale linen coat, a long, buttoned skirt and high-necked blouse, with matching hat, gloves and boots but her costume goes rapidly downhill as they venture downriver, and she ends up as dirty and dishevelled as Charlie. As Rose loosens and loses her tight costume she also throws off her uptight ways in a metamorphosis that sees her change from a stuffy single lady into Charlie's 'first mate.' Their first night-time encounter takes place in a raging storm when Rose allows Charlie to crawl under a curtain made of her petticoats to share her sleeping compartment, and later they sleep together on deck, top-to-toe on tatty old blankets, their ripped, sweaty and stained clothing revealing the traces of fleshly passion denied full



expression under the Hays Code.<sup>9</sup> In another scene bursting with sexually-potent metaphor, as Charlie's boat is loaded with torpedoes to attack the enemy ship 'Louisa,' Rose stands on Charlie's shoulders to hammer a Union Jack to the masthead, her petticoats framing and brushing his head as he smokes and talks, revealing the tiny detail of a small hole and run in the toe of her black stocking (Fig. 1).

When Campion describes trying to find a way to portray the innocence of sex, eroticism and love not seen on screen any more (ibid.) it seems obvious to me that she is referring to Rose and Charlie's relationship in *The African Queen*. Thus, it becomes noticeable that Campion weaves in some of the same material into *The Piano*, as seen for example, Ada's clothes get spoiled as she becomes more involved with Baines. The route to his hut and her piano involves a difficult journey through thick and sticky mud that covers her boots and clings to the hems of her voluminous skirts, and suggests her getting sucked into something dangerous and dirty with Baines. Baines is also to be found under Ada's petticoats exploring a hole in her stocking (Fig. 2) and he later clammers under her crinoline in a moment of passion.

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<sup>9</sup> For a full list of the censorship guidelines see The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code) at <http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html>. [Accessed 08.01.17]



Fig. 1. Rose's stockings feet balance on Charlie's shoulders in *The African Queen*.



Fig. 2. Baines' finger outlines the hole in Ada's stocking in *The Piano*.

Ada's husband, Stewart, wears too-tight clothes, deliberately devised by costume designer Jane Patterson a size smaller than necessary (Bruzzi 1997, p. 58) so that he always appears uncomfortable, uptight and ready to burst. Sam Neill says that his costume felt 'like a shell of self-delusion ... a shell that's shattered by the experience of living with [Ada] who explodes every kind of conception he's had about himself' (ibid.) By comparison, Baines who is his rival for Ada's love, seems relaxed and comfortable in the loose-fitting layers of soft shirt and trousers, a vibrant waistcoat and a floppy straw hat.

In a scene that is reminiscent of the moment in *The African Queen* which first suggests the possibility of sexual attraction between Rose and Charlie when they take a cleansing dip in the river, Baines stands waist-deep in water as he washes his clothes and his Maori friends banter with him about his body and need of a wife. The beautiful, indigo-blue, open-necked shirt he wears in this sequence provides the erotic link in a cut to the next scene in Baines' hut that shows him slowly unbuttoning his top to watch Ada playing the piano in their as-yet unresolved struggle between distance and intimacy.

Whilst Charlie flings off Rose's hat to kiss her when they have passed through the rapids safely, their physical relationship is mostly expressed in ship-based metaphors such as stoking fires and pumping bilge water but their ease and pleasure in each other's company is seen through their clothes which are equally loose, dirty and torn.

When Ada and Baines eventually achieve equality in their desire for each other it is expressed in mutual and willing nakedness on bedding as rough and ripped as the blankets on which Rose and Charlie lie. Through a series of references to Rose's deteriorating costume, not least the hole in her stocking that allows for a pivotal point of eroticism in Ada's outfit, Campion emulates in Ada's dress the way Rose's spoilt clothes allow her to get on an equal footing with Charlie. Similarly, Campion's sensitive, nuanced focus on *The Piano*'s lovemaking scenes that culminate in a study of the pleasure Ada and Baines find in each other's arms, retains an element of the innocence of the romantic and erotic impulse which is so subtly drawn between Rose and Charlie.

Another bed that we see is Ada's, that she shares 'in feminine conspiracy' with her daughter, Flora (ibid.) where they are often seen cuddled up on beautiful, soft linens in their white nightclothes, with a sepia tone romanticizing the intimacy of the female space from which Stewart is excluded. His clumsy attempts to cross that threshold see him rebuffed and ridiculed. For example, Ada and Flora smirk at each other as he backs away from their doorway, clumsily knocking a crinoline off a peg onto his shoulder, and another time they shrink into their pillows away from him to spurn the offer of a goodnight kiss, snuggling up cosily when left alone. Much later, when Flora has run

away to the safety of Baines' hut after Stewart has attacked her mother, a cold blue tint replaces the customary warm hues of Ada's bedroom alerting us to the danger of Stewart lurking around. Ada narrowly avoided an earlier rape attempt when Stewart waylaid her in the forest and now we fear for her again, asleep in a fever as he fusses around her sickbed making excuses for his conduct. He then pulls back her bed linen, revealing her grubby underclothes and sheets that bear the stains of the mud she collapsed in after the assault. Aroused by the bare flesh of her thighs and taking advantage of her semi-conscious state, Stewart climbs on top of her but whilst fumbling with his belt Ada awakens and exerts such a powerful stare of horror and disbelief that he believes she is speaking to him and it stops him in his tracks. As mentioned earlier, the sources of Campion's desire to endow Ada with this silent power to 'lay out thoughts in his mind' are considered in the following section.

### **Stares, Silences and Strangeness: Art Influences in *The Piano***

Campion uses her knowledge of painting and sculpture to enrich her film with a tapestry of references that in many cases evoke her favourite artists' innovative use of textile imagery. This also leads me to another thread that weaves its way throughout *The Piano* and the two other films under consideration - the power of the female gaze. Campion studied painting at London's Chelsea School of Arts and The Sydney School of the Arts, a time she 'relished ... as a foundational experience in her career' when she became particularly interested in the work of the surrealist painter Frida Kahlo and the sculptor Joseph Beuys (McHugh 2007, p. 5). McHugh finds that Campion was insistent that Ada should 'possess Kahlo's look and 'power'' and her 'impassioned, indomitable will'

(2007, p. 12). As illustrated in Figures 3 and 4, McHugh makes the connection between Kahlo's self-portraits that stare out at the viewer and Ada's defiant gaze in what Laura Mulvey describes as the quality that makes Kahlo the subject, and most definitely not the object, of her work (ibid., p. 7). Laura Mulvey also made Kahlo the subject of a documentary made with Peter Wollen entitled *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1983) that sought to give women the pleasure of seeing portrayals of pioneering, creative female role models.



Fig. 3. Detail from *Self-portrait with monkeys* (1943) by Frida Kahlo.



Fig. 4. Portrait shot of Ada.

Mulvey and Wollen note Kahlo's use of luxuriant, fecund trees, vines and fronds in the background of her paintings which tend to creep towards and bind around her body in what they interpret as 'a defence against her knowledge of her own barrenness' (ibid. p. 57). There are moments in the film that show the vegetation creeping up on Ada, for instance, during the difficult journey from the beach to Stewart's house when the bush tears at her clothing and later, when Ada is waylaid in the forest by her husband, his attempt to get under her skirts is made more menacing as the supplejack vines wind about her, trapping her and hindering her escape. Additionally, Campion utilizes an element of Kahlo's 'typical surrealist representations of body-doubling, masquerade and dream

scenarios' (Franscina and Harris 1992, p. 157). These are evident, for example, in the close matching of Ada and Flora's costumes and mannerisms, Ada's set expression which is often framed in an unbecoming bonnet, and in what Barbara Klinger calls Campion's use of the 'arresting image' which seem 'at once visually stirring yet interpretatively opaque' (2006, p. 24). For example, Campion explains that the slightly-erie kiss between Ada and Baines, when she wears a black cloth over her face at the close of the film (Fig. 5), was inspired by the mysterious surrealist painting 'The Lovers' by Magritte (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5. Ada wears a black cloth over her face through which she kisses Baines.



Fig. 6. *The Lovers* (1928) by René Magritte.

Although they are just seen very briefly, I also sense Campion referring to clothing in works of art such as Van Gogh's study of shoes (Fig. 7), for example in the look of like Flora's boots drying before the fire (Fig. 8) and in Arthur Rackham's illustration for Little Red Riding Hood (Fig. 9) that has the feel of Flora and her dog Flynn in the forest (see Fig. 10).



Fig. 7. *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) by Van Gogh.



Fig. 8. Flora's drying boots.

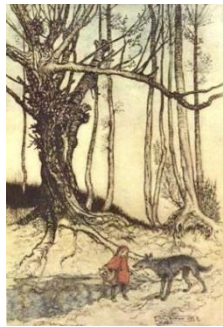


Fig. 9. 'When she got to the wood, she met a wolf' (1909) by Arthur Rackham.



Fig. 10. Flora and Flynn walk in the forest.

The work of Joseph Beuys is repeatedly mentioned as a major inspiration in reviews of *The Piano*, but apart from McHugh who connects Champion's 'obsession with tactility, with objects and the materiality of her mise-en-scène' to Beuys (2007, p.12) the impact of his influence in the film is mostly unexplained. I believe that Beuys' 1966 work *Homogenous Infiltration for Piano* (Fig. 11) has some bearing on *The Piano*. Beuys'

Fluxus<sup>10</sup> colleagues frequently used pianos in art performances, such as John Cage's entirely silent piece *4'33" for Piano* (1955) but Beuys used the piano for more conceptual and symbolic purposes. In a description of the felt-wrapped *Homogenous Infiltration for Piano* (1966) the artist says:

The sound of the piano is trapped inside the felt skin. In the normal sense a piano is an instrument used to produce sound. When not in use it is silent, but still has a sound potential. Here, no sound is possible and the piano is condemned to silence. (Tisdall 1979, p.168)



Fig. 11. *Homogenous Infiltration for Piano* (1966) by Joseph Beuys.

Beuys' felt-wrapped, silenced piano thus resonates closely with what Champion describes as Ada's 'poetic choice' to remain silent as she:

act[ed] out what she felt inside – she was unheard, and would be unheard, and in a way there would be no point in speaking because the whole world was not interested in hearing what women think or feel. (1997)

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<sup>10</sup> An international group of artists, musicians and designers who blended their respective media in a mix of anti-art, anti-commercial aesthetics. Famous Fluxists include George Brecht, Nam June Paik and Yoko Ono.



Later still, as president of the 2014 Cannes film festival jury, Campion also reveals that the desolate image of Ada's piano abandoned on the beach was a metaphor for describing her situation as a lone female filmmaker. 'Back then, it was a cipher for some of my own frustrations about having a voice, and not being seen or heard' (Pulver 2014).

Joan Kirkby notes a strong similarity between the look of Emily Dickinson and Ada (Figs. 12 and 13) and Cheri Davis Langdell finds that 'Ada's refusal to speak is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's refusal to appear in public after her mid-thirties' (1996, p. 199).



Fig. 12. Photograph of Emily Dickinson  
ca. 1847.



Fig. 13. Ada in *The Piano*.

Langdell also notices that as Dickinson became steadily more silent and reclusive she became more reliant on the emphatic use of the punctuation em-dash - the 'non-verbal space between words creating a subversive ... wordless sound' - and notices something similar in the non-verbal element of Campion's film, so that 'each - the poetry and the film - becomes a powerful critique of the patriarchal world they inhabit' (1996, p. 200). Campion confirms the validity of this idea in a conversation with Jan Chapman who asks her to describe her methods for directing Hunter's almost completely silent performance throughout the film, saying that her aim was to focus the viewer's attention on gaining an

internal intimacy with Ada through ‘a kind of femininity to the vision [with] a softness or a pause in it’ (1997).

McHugh describes Ada as ‘a composite’ character made up from the personalities of Campion’s favourite artists and writers (2007, p. 81). I suggest that another way of seeing and understanding Ada is offered to us through Campion’s visual references to the textures, colours, styles and rhythms present in the textiles and associated ideas in the art and literature made by those and other artists. Thus, Kahlo’s paintings give us Ada’s harsh, bonneted looks; the matching outfits and guises of mother and daughter; and the inspiration for the supplejack vines that threaten to seize Ada in the forest. Beuys’ felt-encased Piano evokes layers of meaning concerned with notions of creativity or communication that is stifled or thwarted. Magritte’s ‘Lovers’ inspires the cloth that covers Ada’s face as she learns to speak and Campion’s references to Dickinson’s quiet, poetic use of gaps and pauses supports an innovatively tender and discreet way of telling Ada’s story.

### **Washing Lines: Defining new spaces to air the laundry**

Mary Ann Doane’s study of a series of films including *Rebecca* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *Suspicion* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) and *Secret Beyond the Door* (dir. Fritz Lang, 1947) all share unsettling characteristics that strike a similar chord with *The Piano*: a hasty marriage soon after which the wife fears for her life; a Freudian sense of the uncanny making the home seem simultaneously familiar yet unfamiliar; and, reminiscent

of the Bluebeard story, a room in the house to which the woman is denied access (1984, pp. 286-9). The woman is often pictured at a window, watching, waiting and worrying:

The window has special import in terms of the social and symbolic positioning of the woman – the woman is the interface between outside and inside, the feminine space of the family and reproduction and the masculine space of production. It facilitates a communication by means of the look between two sexually differentiated spaces. That interface becomes a potential point of violence, intrusion and aggression in the paranoid woman's films. (1984, p. 288)

Ada is often to be found looking troubled or trapped by a window or doorway and ultimately Stewart bars up the windows and doors of their home to try to keep her within its walls and with him. After the ordeal of the wedding photograph, Ada is seen as if trapped behind a window in her new marital home. From the outside looking in, the camera does a slow zoom-in on Ada's face, and her anguish seems to be doubled by the scattered raindrops on the windowpane that overlay her own tears, and the rivulets of water running down the glass cast shadowy scars onto Ada's face.

In addition to Doane's identification of the window as a signifier of gendered space with its potential for 'violence, intrusion and aggression' I would like to call attention to another important interface that separates women from men in a dramatic space and plot dynamic: the clothesline, which also gives the woman access to a legitimate if limited outdoor area of her own. Lisa French observes one such territory in an earlier work by

Campion in *An Angel at My Table* (1990) where the sisters make a new friend, and show kindness and rapport with one another:

Janet Frame (Kerry Fox) and her sisters stop at a friend's fence on the way home, and she performs a Spanish dance for them amongst the washing. The friend dances through the washing, dramatically pulling it aside with a theatrical exclamation: 'Olay!' This characterizes the space as domestic and ordinary. The washing might seem strangely in the way but it is important as a signifier of female space. (2007, p. 150)

The clothesline is further charged with the energy of displaying cleansed personal items so that what is normally kept close to the skin like underwear, shirts and sheets are suddenly available for all to see, thus becoming a site where clothing refers to unclothing and the private becomes public. The line of washing is often used to show a metaphorical line of divide, frequently separating females from males who live by different rules. A good example of this may be seen in *Unforgiven* (dir. Clint Eastwood, 1992) when two cowboys return to the town to settle a debt for the attack one of them carried out on Delilah (Anna Levine), a prostitute at the local brothel. Passing her and the other girls who stand by the clotheslines in the back yard of the property, which incidentally shows the town's dirty laundry getting a very public airing (Fig. 14), the clothesline demarcates a boundary that separates the wild from the tame, the worldly from the innocent, the lawless from the law-abiding and the corrupt from the honourable.



Fig. 14. The women watch Delilah's attacker enter town in *Unforgiven*.

When characters are placed on either side of a washing line, and one of them attempts to cross over from their side to trespass on the other's physical or emotional space, this is inevitably a sign of trouble, and one that can escalate very rapidly. Banter and teasing, inquiry or even confession can spill over quickly into lies, quarrels, threats and attacks. In *Inglourious Basterds*, Col. Landa's falsely-courteous greeting to the farmer is set against the display of M. LaPedit's socks and long johns wafting in the breeze, alerting us to the idea that his family is exposed, vulnerable and in terrible danger (Fig. 15). In *Cold Mountain*, as the father's dead body hangs amongst the drying sheets in a mocking display of brutality, the effect of blood soaking through clean white linen creates a shocking image of the agony and suffering inflicted on the victim and their family (Figs. 16 and 17).



Fig. 15. Colonel Landa passes behind the line of washing towards the farm justice in *Inglourious Basterds*.



Fig. 16. The Home Guard dispense rough on the Swanger family in *Cold Mountain*.



Fig. 17. Blood streaks through a white sheet  
in *Cold Mountain*.

The use of shadowy outlines seen through sheets, a device used frequently in *The Piano* to suggest something ominous hanging in the air (Fig. 18), is also found with great dramatic effect in many other films. Examples are found, for instance, in *Heaven's Gate* as the silhouette of the hired gunman Nathan D. Champion (Christopher Walken) is seen slowly taking aim with a shotgun is thrown onto the surface of a white sheet (Fig. 19). In *Saving Mr. Banks* (dir. John Lee Hancock, 2013) Travers Goff (Colin Farrell), arrives home and early plays with his children in the bright shadows of the sun. However, the shadow that hangs over the family is that this wonderful, charming father, is also a hopeless alcoholic whose addiction is slowly destroying the family (Fig. 20).



Fig. 18. Scene from *The Piano*'s  
'Bluebeard' shadow play.



Fig. 19. Champion shoots through  
a sheet in *Heaven's Gate*.



Fig. 20. The father and  
children play in the  
sheets in *Saving Mr Banks*.

Campion is a great advocate of the expressive and creative use of the washing line in her films, using the iconic Australian Hills Hoist in *Sweetie* (1989) to show something uneasy stirring in suburbia (Wexman 1999, pp. 27-28), or showing laundry strung across poor, urban alleyways (which also possibly hide, for example, modern fixtures like power lines and satellite dishes)<sup>11</sup> in *A Portrait of a Lady* (1996) and *Bright Star* (2009) (Figs. 21 and 22).



Fig. 21. Washing hangs in an Italian alley  
in *Portrait of a Lady*.



Fig. 22. Washing hangs in a London  
backstreet in *Bright Star*.

The vast expanses of white laundry hanging and laid out to dry on Hampstead Heath in *Bright Star*'s early scenes are equally an impressive feat of design, construction and beauty (Figs. 23 and 24).

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<sup>11</sup> Noted from the Bangor 125th Anniversary lecture Q&A with Dr. Who Production Designer Edward Thomas, 28th October 2009 who discussed the usefulness of hanging washing lines to hide such things as modern electricity lines.



Fig. 23. Long shot of Fanny and her family walking through multiple washing lines at the opening of *Bright Star*.



Fig. 24. Angled, long-distance shot revealing the full composition of the washing lines in *Bright Star*.

There is something joyous, hopeful and wholesome about these linens drying on a fine, breezy day that contrasts vividly with a later scene's ominous overtones when Mrs. Brawne (Kerry Fox) notices Keats (Ben Whishaw) outside her house by the washing line in heavy rain 'behaving very oddly' (Campion 2009). The inference here is that hanging around the washing in a downpour is a risky endeavour, not only from the elements, but through the pathetic fallacy of perilous emotions. Thus, the ghostly, shroud-like forms of Mrs. Brawne's chill, wet washing forewarn that the consumptive Keats is likely to catch his death of cold (Fig. 25); and in *The Piano* we fear for Ada's life as she is dragged by Stuart through the drenched cloth and clothes that hang in limp, ghoulish witness to the unfolding horror (Fig 26).



Fig. 25. Keats paces around under the Brawne's wet washing in *Bright Star*.



Fig. 26. Stuart drags Ada through the limp, drenched laundry.



Other lines of washing in *The Piano* are used to show conjugal tensions building between Ada and Stewart. Indoors, where drying laundry has the effect of making a room seem claustrophobic, and hanging clothes eerily appear to mimic their owners as if they are ‘the body’s body,’ (Erasmus, 1530 p. 108) Stewart informs Ada that he has swapped her piano in a land deal with Baines. Ada reacts violently, wrenching down petticoats from a creaking overhead laundry rack so that the remaining dress bobs and swings in agitation to mirror her unspeakable rage. Later, during a visit from Aunt Morag, Stewart stands near the drying rack which illustrates the wide physical and emotional gulf between him and Ada as his nightwear hangs alone at the farthest distance possible away from his wife’s stockings.

*The Piano*’s inventive clothesline arrangements which show Ada in dramatic silhouette moving behind the sheets, or those that hang on stage to show ‘Bluebeard’ in shadow play, are reminiscent of the washing line arrangements in *Beauty and the Beast* (Figs. 27 and 28). Cocteau’s published diary of the making of the film details the struggles required in shortages-ridden post-war France simply to hire enough linen for the washing lines, and then the determination, stamina and vision required to achieve his artistic vision. For example, the entry for ‘Monday evening, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945, 7.30 pm,’ says:

The décor was one of those that I had to make with my own hands. Nobody could help me. To start with, the clothes props bent, the clothes lines (sic) weren’t long enough, the sheets were too short and there weren’t enough of them. To crown all, the wind got up, making them billow, and ruined their perspectives. The costumes

stood out marvellously against the walls of linen, and made fine shadows through them. (1972, p. 9)

Cocteau also goes on to describe his satisfaction with washing line scenes such as an actor lifting the corner of a sheet as though it were an Italianate stage curtain, a sky-blue dress looking ‘ravishing’ against the rows of white hangings and how a scene he had not thought much of had become ‘very lovely’ with girls in high spirits surrounded by disordered sheets and frothing lather (ibid., pp. 16-17 and 22).



Figs. 27 and 28. Stills from Cocteau’s *Beauty and The Beast: Diary of a Film*

showing washing draped to look like a stage set and emphasizing a dramatic shadowy form.

Campion introduces ominous, shadowy images that lead up to the Bluebeard play and the climactic axe scene, such as the housekeeper who passes behind glass panels as Ada prepares to leave her Scottish home or Flora pretending her hand is a moth inside the illuminated crinoline on the beach, and then the parlour scene where menacing shadows are cast onto the yellow wallpaper as the Reverend’s cardboard axe chops at Nessie’s hands.

Campion’s staging for the Bluebeard play combines two Victorian tricks of illusion which create horror effects both in front of and behind hanging sheets. On the

right-hand side of the stage there is a display of disembodied female heads dripping with blood, which Campion says was inspired by ‘a fantastical photo’ from a New Zealand archive (ibid.) (Figs. 29 and 30). Shielding her eyes from such a gruesome sight, Nessie walks behind another hanging sheet on the left-hand side of the stage, carrying a large key to meet Bluebeard who looms over her with an axe held high (Figs. 31 and 32). The key in Bluebeard which unlocks the forbidden room is an ancient symbol for the ‘unsubtle image of the mechanics of sex’ (Barber 1994, p. 62).



Fig. 29. Photograph, probably from a performance of Bluebeard, entitled ‘Victorian heads afloat’ ca. 1885.



Fig. 30. Nessie and the dead wives in the Bluebeard play in *The Piano*.



Fig. 31. Nessie passes behind the sheet to enter into the Bluebeard shadow play.



Fig. 32. Bluebeard wields his axe in *The Piano*'s shadow play.

At this point, the Maoris cause panic amongst the audience and players alike when they rush the stage to save Nessie from Bluebeard, ripping down the sheets to get at the villain. With this brutal, shadow play image of an axe-wielding husband intent on murdering his wife still fresh in our minds, we are disposed to feel fearful for Ada when we later see her silhouette passing back and forth in front of white curtains as Stewart leaves the house. In a pun that references the Bluebeard key, Ada writes a message of love to Baines on a piano key and the tension increases as her dark form then passes behind a large sheet stretched out to dry on the porch where she disrupts Flora's play to insist on her taking the key to Baines (Fig. 33). The foreshadowing of the Bluebeard play now gathers momentum to show Stewart metamorphosing into the axe-wielding villain as he rushes home in a fury through a gathering storm that tinges the forest in blue tones. He swings his axe wildly into the furniture before dragging Ada outside towards the chopping block, and through a veil of heavy rain we see Ada desperately clutching onto a sheet, which rips in audio-visual replication of the Bluebeard set pulled down by the Maoris, but this time they are not there to save her (Fig. 34).



Fig. 33. Ada's shadow passes behind a sheet hanging on her veranda.



Fig. 34. The enraged Stewart is as intent as Bluebeard to punish his wife.

The seemingly innocuous line of washing, then, that frequently forms a physical barrier to show men and women at the intersection of illusion and reality or safety and harm, is also an extraordinarily versatile and subtle means of defining what divides characters in matters of sex, life and death.

### **Tears, Holes, Gaps and Bloodstains**

Campion also constructs what at first seems to be a mischievous set of sexual allusions, through a series of references to holes in different fabrics and materials that are peeped and poked through. These include the already-mentioned example of Baines' finger caressing the hole in Ada's stocking which hints towards a chink in Ada's armour or a breach in her defences. Earlier, on the beach, Ada reaches through a small gap in the crate that has protected her piano in transit, enabling her to play a few notes before the tide rushes in (Fig. 35); Flora pokes at Flynn the dog with a stick through a hole in Baines' porch as her mother is inside learning how to bargain for her piano; and at different times Flora and Stewart secretly peer through knots in the wood of Baines' hut to spy on Ada in the act of lovemaking (Fig. 36). However, each of these holes or gaps also offer the possibility of finding a way through a seemingly impenetrable barrier where desire, curiosity or wilfulness have previously only been met with a wall of silence.



Fig. 35. Ada touches her piano through a gap in the crate.



Fig. 36. Flora peeps through a hole in Baines' hut.

Another significant hole reference shows Nessie's hand poking through a tear in a sheet as Aunt Morag instructs her to show Stewart how the heads of Bluebeard's wives 'will go through these slits' (Fig. 37), evoking simultaneously ideas of sex, birth and death. There are many images in *The Piano* of deathly faces made more dramatic by fabrics that frame them in a moment of horror, such as the women who scream in terror as the Maoris rush the stage (Fig. 38) or Flora who fears for her mother's life as blood is sprayed onto her pinafore from Stuart's axe (Fig. 39), and then, as Ada nearly drowns, her pale face is framed against the black background of her floating skirt to show the moment when she chooses life over death (Fig. 40).



Fig. 37. Nessie shows Stewart the dramatic slits which the women's heads will go through in the Bluebeard play.



Fig. 38. One of Bluebeard's victims screams as the Maoris rush the stage.



Fig. 39. Flora is splashed with her mother's blood during Stewart's attack.



Fig. 40. Ada's deathly face is framed by her clothing underwater before she struggles to the surface.

In the same way that the clothesline may be encroached upon in malice, anger or greed, here, too, the cloth and clothes that are violated, torn or splattered in blood further symbolize the sexual, life and death struggles that threaten to overpower, overwhelm or silence the characters in *The Piano*.

### **Conclusion**

Rose's disintegrating costume in *The African Queen* and Ada's gradual uncovering in *The Piano* are visual metaphors for revealing hidden emotions and a willingness to discover eroticism. Similarly, their dirtied clothing brings them down to an equal level with their men and signifies a willingness to forfeit purity for love. Equally, Charlie and Baines' loose-fitting, practical clothes, as opposed to Stuart's tight and proper outfits, that read as relaxed vs. uptight are also indicators of character and sexual attractiveness.

As Ada explains, she had the ability to silently transmit her thoughts to Flora's father. She explains in sign language: 'I didn't need to speak. I could lay thoughts out in his

mind like they were a sheet.’ This idea is also projected by Campion who, through the use of shadows and sheets, deftly plants in our minds a connection between the horrors of the Bluebeard play and our fears for Ada with the jealous Stuart.

Campion’s rich references to art and literature bring great texture and depth to the look of Ada, and to the power of her silence and gaze. Campion admits that it took her many years to understand how much of Ada’s silence represented her empathy for women past and present who have struggled to have their voices heard, including her own as a female director. I also suggest that Campion’s potent allusions to tears and holes, such as in the stocking or Nessie’s sheet, are also a nascent expression of the need to find a breach in the defences that will allow women to access what they want in life.



## Unfolding layers of meaning in the clothes and textiles of Sandra Goldbacher's

### *The Governess*

*The Governess* set in 1830s Britain, is the story of Rosina da Silva, a spirited and clever young Sephardic Jewess, whose comfortable life is shattered by the death and debts of her beloved father. Seeking employment and adventure Rosina reinvents herself as a Christian called Mary Blackchurch and goes to work as a governess for the Cavendish family in Scotland. Whilst there, she also takes on the role of studio assistant to the head of the household, Charles Cavendish (Tom Wilkinson) who is experimenting with the new science of photography. A love affair develops between them but ultimately Cavendish rejects her and she returns to her family and community as a photographer in her own right.

Judith Lewin describes *The Governess* as a film which 'did not show up on a lot of people's radar' due to being 'murkily-marketed as an historic/chick-flick' that 'fail[ed] to target overtly one of its potential audiences: Jews' and which attracted only 'a handful of articles ... in film journals or film books' (2008. p. 88). My interest in the film lies in the way its sumptuous use of fabrics and costume illuminate the screen, the characters, and add a depth of semiotic meaning to the telling of Rosina's story.

Two studies have been of particular help in developing a deeper appreciation of the clothes and textiles in the film: Helene Meyers' essay 'Educating for a Jewish gaze' which celebrates Goldbacher's work for 'mak[ing] visible Jewish bodies and Jewish

beauty' (2008) and Judith Lewin's 'smart reading' (Alpert 2009) of *The Governess* entitled 'Semen, Semolina and Salt Water' (2008).

In search of further information, an examination of reviews of *The Governess* finds the issues of textiles cropping up in language that derides it as a 'bodice ripper' (Leeper 1998) or 'smutty' (Baehr) and 'sudsy' (Johan). Jordan Hiller's view that it is a 'hot (yet utterly tasteful) period piece' seems equally unpromising until he turns his attention towards the details of Rosina's 'enchanted' (as in its powers to bewitch) black governess dress and the 'achingly beautiful symbols of traditional Judaism' including the *tallit*<sup>12</sup> that Rosina wraps herself in to ward off her sense of grief and loneliness so far away from home (2009). Blackwelder's review picks up on the detail of Rosina's young charge, Clementina (Florence Hoath) described by her governess as 'a rodent in lace petticoats,' (1998) and whilst Ken Eisner concedes that the film is 'beautifully crafted' he complains that it is 'art-directed to death, with more attention paid to fabrics, textures and colours ... than to narrative coherence' (1998). Allan Stone, however, admires Goldbacher's 'superb' psychological portrayal of Rosina's sexuality from a feminine perspective and assures his readers that *The Governess* 'repays sustained consideration' (1998). I would argue that a large element of the 'feminine perspective' is delivered through Goldbacher's attention to fabrics, textures and colours.

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<sup>12</sup> In Orthodox tradition, a tallit is given from a father to a son on reaching his bar-mitzvah age, thirteen, symbolizing his entry into Jewish manhood and the shouldering of those accompanying responsibilities.

### Gathering meaning from *The Governess's Tallit*

*The Governess* opens with a close-up of the edge of a piece of fabric that lifts and sways to the rise and fall of a man's chanting voice (Figs. 41 and 42). In the thirteen seconds that the camera focuses on the cloth there is time to notice the warp and weft of homespun wool, woven into stripes of different widths and colours, and its knotted fringe that casts dramatic shadows onto the weave.



Figs. 41. and 42. Title and Filmmaker's opening credit over tallit close-up.

The opening credits roll for another eighty seconds over a scene that widens to show a congregation of Jewish men wearing *tallitot* (pl. tallit) over their shoulders, who sway back and forth in prayer in a synagogue. The effect of the undulating black and white tallitot as the men move in unison in a communal spiritual experience, seen from above and behind, at a diagonal angle and in soft-focus low light, is mesmerizing and ethereal.

A reverse shot shows Rosina and her sister Becca (Emma Bird) looking down from the ladies' gallery at a handsome young man below them who has turned to say something to his neighbour (Fig 43). The folds of his tallit draw attention to the contours of his smooth, tanned neck and broad shoulders, prompting Becca's unexpected comment, 'I hate hair on a man's neck. It would be like petting a monkey.' As Lewin

points out, the sisters' sexual banter above the intonation of prayers establishes Rosina 'not only as Jewish, but also unorthodox, rebellious and sexual' (2008, p. 90).



Figs. 43 and 44. Rosina and Becca look down from the gallery at the tallit-wearing men below.

It turns out that the young man under their gaze is Rosina's beau, and whilst Becca defers to her sister's attachment to Benjamin, she equally reveals and conceals her own desires for this young man in his prayer shawl. Benjamin's tallit, which defines him as a worthy son of his family and congregation, also holds the promise of his future potential as a husband and father in traditions that would be well understood by Rosina and Becca. Translating from the Hebrew where *tal* means tent and *ith* means little, the tallit thus forms a little tent or space for the wearer to commune with God. A tallit may also be used as a *chuppah*, the traditional wedding canopy under which a bride and groom stand to be married; the groom may also use the tallit to wrap himself close to his bride in a symbolic gesture of taking her into his care; and in time, a child of that union may be wrapped in a tallit in honour of its birth.

Finally, the tallit is used at the end of a person's life to cover them for burial. For Rosina, the traumatic experience of seeing her murdered father laid out in an embroidered tallit, is wrapped up with the confusion of being forcibly removed from the scene. Benjamin is

amongst the men saying prayers for her father, and he rushes to restrain her as another man holds out his tallit to shield the corpse from her sight. As Benjamin pushes her away, she clutches at his tallit, which falls from his shoulders, and it is as if the falling tallit signifies everything slipping away from her – her father, her marriage prospects and her family's financial security.

Some months later, far away from home in the loneliness of her cold, dark governess's room, we come to realize the significance of the beautiful close-up image of the tallit that opens the film, alongside which the director has placed her name and film title.

Goldbacher expands temporal boundaries to allow Rosina to take up her father's tallit in a way that anticipates proto-feminist, proto-Reform Judaism acts of assertion. Rosina sits on her bed and unfolds one of her most precious possessions, her father's old tallit, which she wraps around her shoulders in a bold gesture of consolation and remembrance to perform her own private Passover Seder. She peers into the flame of a candle and remembers herself as a young girl watching her father drip wine onto a plate at a long-past Seder, and later, immersed in her memories and still wrapped in the tallit she goes to sleep weeping. In two earlier dream-sequences we have seen Rosina's father visit her as she sleeps, including one that seems to be a memory of her as a young child pretending to sleep as her father pretends to make her levitate. This time, however, the man in (or of) her dreams, who tenderly touches her face and whose conjuring trick has an air of eroticism about it, is not her father but the man who has become more than a father figure to her, her employer Charles Cavendish. Here, it seems, the tallit has wound its way into

Rosina's subconscious to sanction a transfer of her love for her father to another sympathetic father-figure.

From the opening scene in the synagogue to the night of the murder and then in her lonely Seder, the tallit has wrapped Rosina in a web of conflicting emotions in relation to the men in her life. From its symbolic folds of security, hope and desire, Rosina's life unravels in rejection, unbearable grief and isolation. However, as she takes the tallit onto her own shoulders on the night of the Seder (Fig. 45), we also are reminded of the opening scene where the tallit-wearing Benjamin stirs up ideas of sexual love in Rosina and Becca, thus showing the shawl's potential for reassigning a young woman's thoughts of daughterly love to the more intimate love she will have for a husband.



Fig. 45. Rosina wraps herself in the warmth and comfort of her father's tallit.

In the moment before the tallit is on her shoulders, Rosina lifts it above her head, arms outstretched behind her (Fig. 46), in a pose that shows the tallit as a 'little tent' which forms the secret, mystical place where she can feel close to her spiritual Father, her deceased father, her would-be husband, and the community she has left behind. Equally, it is symbolic of Rosina taking on the mantle of responsibility for herself, and evokes the

cloth of her future profession, under which she will compose the beautiful photos praised by the Royal Society for capturing ‘the beauty of her father’s people’ (Fig. 47).



Figs. 46. & 47. Rosina under the ‘little tent’ of her father’s tallit and under the black-out cloth at the back of the camera

### **The Shirt**

Lehman and Hunt argue that Rosina’s desire to achieve ‘literal and symbolic access to the male body’ comes from the moment when she is barred access, in accordance with Jewish custom, to the body of her beloved father (2002). Rosina’s experience of rejection, loss and grief leads her in a search for comfort in the form of another masculine garment, the shirt or *kittel*,<sup>13</sup> to allow her to pass from the loving arms of her father into the embrace of another man.

Rosina’s father is always seen correctly dressed for the period in a suit, waistcoat and tie, as seen for example, when father and daughter dance together at the party.

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<sup>13</sup> A kittel is a white linen shirt-like garment, first worn by a Jewish man on his wedding day, then on High Holy days, and finally serves as a burial garment.

Victorian codes of conduct decreed that it was indecent for a man to appear in his shirtsleeves without a waistcoat or jacket in front of any woman except his wife. This was because the shirt was then worn as an undergarment, and hence a man wearing only his shirt would be half-dressed. However, a man caught off-guard in a full white shirt is a time-honoured romantic notion, as seen in the iconic moment of the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* when Darcy (Colin Firth) (Fig. 48), fresh from diving in the lake in his shirt and britches, causes Elizabeth Bennett (Jennifer Ehle) to struggle with her composure at the state of his undress. What is implied, of course, is her suppressed desire to press herself up against the white shirt and to be held in his arms.



Fig. 48. Colin Firth as Darcy in the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* (1995).

Not long after her father's death, we see Rosina pacing around the family drawing room reading aloud to Becca and Benjamin a notice placed in the newspaper by a young woman seeking employment as a governess. Benjamin, who appears to have maintained his position as Rosina's suitor despite her mother's attempts at matchmaking, sits comfortably on a settee reading a book. He is not wearing a jacket but wears dark trousers, a silk waistcoat and a black cravat at the neck of a white shirt, with full sleeves and many gathers at the cuff to emphasize its plentiful cut and luxuriance. At first he participates in what he perceives as Rosina's game to find a pseudonym to advertise her



own services, but as she becomes more animated with the idea he becomes cross with her and tightly folds his arms across his chest, saying ‘You can’t do this.’ As we remember, it was Benjamin who barred her from gaining access to her dead father and pushed her away from the scene, and now he denies her his support with shirted arms that repeatedly shut her out and deny her comfort.

When Rosina enters the Cavendish household, the head of the household and his son Henry (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) are often to be found jacketless, in shirts with voluminous, romantic sleeves. Cavendish also has many studies of bird wings in his studio that are shown repeatedly and in great detail. In the stills below, I notice a visual link between Charles’ shirtsleeves and his photographic studies of wings (Figs. 49 and 50), and I also sense that there is also a symbolic connection to the tallit – for when the wearer is beneath the corners of the tallit, which are also known as wings, they are within the safety of God’s wings, and under his care. Thus, it is possible to understand that the full-sleeved shirt, which offers a comforting, protective and intimate embrace, is also closely aligned to the spiritual protection offered by the tallit.



Fig. 49. Charles by his wing studies.



Fig. 50. Rosina is held in Charles’ arms.

When Rosina poses for Charles in an erotic sequence as Salomé, the scene is intercut with brief, almost subliminal cuts to the gull wing pictures, and then the camera turns away from her to track along a display of photographs which are all variations on the theme of the severed wing. This allows us to realize that Rosina's exotic tableaux are merely an erotic diversion for Charles, who is much more comfortable studying stable, scientific objects. The broken gull's wing can thus be seen to symbolize and foreshadow Rosina's inevitable hurt and fall from the arms of Charles.

The catalyst to the end of the affair comes when Rosina removes Charles' shirt when he has fallen asleep after lovemaking and photographs him naked. Soon after this, Charles' son Henry goes to the rejected Rosina, entering as a husband might into his wife's room, white-shirted and hoping to make love to her. Again, Rosina removes the young man's shirt, but the effect of admiring his youthful beauty arrests any sexual temptation she feels and leads her instead to hold him in a very tender, maternal way.

Physically barred access to her father's murdered body by the young man who should have been her husband, Rosina works through her loss by gaining full access to the bodies of the husbandly-shirted father-figure Charles, and his son Henry. However, divested of the beautiful folds of their shirts, Rosina finds that the cloth promised more than flesh could deliver, and that neither man is marriage material. What we see instead is Rosina abandoning the Cavendish men, awarding herself compensation for Charles' professional betrayal by helping herself to his lenses, and starting her own photographic

business, thus making the cloth of her camera a surrogate ‘little tent’ and an alternative to the comforts of a husbandly tallit or shirt.

### **The use of other textiles in *The Governess***

It is commonly understood that clothes can help to define a character, but before I investigate Rosina’s costumes, I would also like to consider the range of textiles that surround her, which help to represent the warmth, or the lack of it, in her life. The Da Silva house as we see it at the opening of the film is vibrant and lively as a party is in full swing, with many guests dancing and enjoying fine food. The rooms are draped with vast swathes of crimson and gold curtains, crystal and silver embellish the surfaces, and warm fires and masses of candles reflect a golden glow of warmth and comfort. This theme is continued in the snug and intimate space of the sisters’ bedroom, which is also richly draped in red and gold curtains and coverings but with the addition of heaps of white linens on and around the bed. Beautiful, bright, high-spirited, and adored by her father, Rosina shines like a jewel in the reflection of her surroundings.

All this is a far cry from Rosina’s new situation at the Cavendish house. Arriving in a downpour, Rosina stands alone in the cold of a dark and gloomy hallway waiting for someone to notice her, until a maid bearing a candle comes out of the darkness and reprimands her for being late. Rosina follows the girl up a shadowy stone staircase, lined with rack upon rack of spiky-antlered deer heads, and along a corridor lit by candles that barely penetrate the darkness to the chilly confines of her new quarters. Although she has been expected, no sign of welcome is evident in the room, where the fire is unlit, and the

space is cluttered with items clearly not wanted in the rest of a house such as an eerie portrait and morbid taxidermy trophies. It is not until Rosina opens her clothes trunk that any colour comes into the room, and we see her select a brightly striped shawl that she presses tenderly against her face to remind herself of the elegance and fragrance of home. The scene cuts to show Rosina walking along another ill-lit corridor and entering a fine, spacious drawing room where she first encounters the lacklustre lady of the house, Mrs. Cavendish (Harriet Walter). Although the room is tastefully decorated in pinks, creams and greens, it is seen through a filter which drains the colours of any vibrancy, making the room as washed-out and jaded looking as the character of the mother of her new charge. The rest of the house interior is also stone cold and dreary. The schoolroom is sparsely furnished with bare boards and has no curtains at the window, the dining room is richly ornamented but is overwhelmingly dark, as is the chapel, and Charles' laboratory is grey, black and white.

Goldbacher and her cinematographer, Ashley Rowe, confirm that they were aiming to evoke sharp contrasts of feeling between the London world suffused with warm lighting and a colour palette of deep reds with the cold, dark tones of the house in Scotland. The director explains:

I wanted it to be quite strange and hard and odd, to create these two different worlds: the exotic, labyrinthine almost subterranean world of the Sephardic Jewish quarter that is almost underneath London, and the gentile world as Rosina first sees it, which is harsh and cold, bleak and disturbing. Hopefully all the visuals have emotional connections. (Goldbacher 1998)

It comes as some relief, then, that Rosina has brought some brightness with her in the form of wraps and shawls that enable her to enfold herself in the material reminders of her warm and loving home. Soon after taking on responsibilities in Charles' research work, Rosina persuades her employer to section off an area where they can advance his experiments in light exposure, and it is here that she gradually introduces a range of wall hangings and drapes which transform the space into an intimate studio. In time, Rosina persuades Charles to make 'A Biblical study in the manner of Raphael ... as Queen Esther' offering him an 'exotic Jewish sexual projection of herself' by posing as a woman who 'notoriously passed as Persian until it became time to save the Jews' (Lewin 2008, p. 96) (Fig. 51). Rosina poses in front of an arrangement of fine crimson and gold fabrics that are draped to resemble an oriental tent, and we see a small, satisfied smile flicker across her face as she notices Cavendish struggling to pretend that he has not caught himself looking briefly but longingly into her eyes. Retreating behind his camera to regain control of the situation, the effect Rosina has had on him is subtly projected against the textiles behind her that frame her in their sexualized, velvety, red folds.



Fig. 51. Rosina poses for Charles as Queen Esther.

There is also an undeniable sense that Rosina's attempts at role-play here are a realization of her girlhood ambitions that saw her melodramatic attempts at home to portray tragedy,

joy and rapture for Becca, when she protests ‘I don’t see why I shouldn’t go on the stage. Aunt Sofka is an actress.’ However, Rosina’s attraction to play-acting puts her on dangerous ground as Lewin explains: ‘Jewish women in particular, delighted London audiences as singers and actresses’ but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries actresses were commonly thought of as immoral, and there was a pervasive blurring of ‘the distinctions between actresses, prostitutes and exotic Jewish women’ (2008, p. 90).

The beautiful textiles Rosina takes with her into the Cavendish house, are at first mostly to provide her with a connection to her family, but gradually as she introduces more and more fabrics into Charles’s workspace to cover the chill of the stone floors and walls, it is transformed into a little sanctuary, a little tent, where she can recreate the warmth of her Jewish home and where creativity energy and intimacy can thrive.

Rosina also struggles with her dark governess clothes and yearns to lighten the burden of her masquerade with cheer and vibrancy A close look at her costume untangles many of the threads that show her wrapped in layers of clothing that equally conceal and reveal her identity.

### **The Governess Dress**

Costume pundit Genevieve Valentine is vexed by Mary Blackchurch’s improbable governess costume, with its shiny fabric and immodest cut that reveals what she describes

as ‘excessive chemise’<sup>14</sup> (1998) and Eisner finds her ‘work outfits look like “Emma”-meets-Emma Peel’ (1998) (Figs. 53 and 54). They are simply not at all like the usual staid governess garments as seen, for instance, in a BBC production of *Jane Eyre* (Fig 52).



Fig. 52. Ruth Wilson as Jane Eyre, BBC 2006  
(with chemise showing under the sleeves).

In interviews for *The Boston Phoenix* and *The Chicago Tribune*, Goldbacher explains how she created Rosina’s character and look through a combination of her own family’s story, through research into Victorian London’s Sephardic Jewish community, and from the wealth of governess stories in nineteenth century literature. The director’s father is a Jew from Padua<sup>15</sup> who managed to reach London from Italy during World War II where

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<sup>14</sup> The chemise is a simple, full, loose white undergarment worn to protect outerwear from direct contact with the body.

<sup>15</sup> Helene Meyers’ essay explains that ‘Goldbacher seeks not only to represent visually the Sephardic Jews of nineteenth-century London but also to memorialize indirectly the Padua Jewish community that was deported to and murdered in Auschwitz’ (2008, p. 115).

he met her mother, who is from the Isle of Skye where the film is set (Petракis, 1998).

Goldbacher also tells Petракis that, lacking any fictional representations of Sephardic Jews in 1840s London, and with no precedents to follow, her inspiration had to come from historical works in the British Library, and the rest from imagination (ibid.).

Goldbacher says that although she ‘grew up on the novels of the Brontë sisters and ... just loved these strong, passionate heroines at the centre of them’ she was not so happy with the fate of those young women, who:

... always ended up either being punished and dying horrible deaths from smallpox or consumption, or getting married and that was the end of it, and you never knew more about the problems of the marriage or the sexuality of it. So I wanted to have a strong, passionate woman but give it a sensibility where you could see the choices she was facing (Susman, 1998).

It should come as no surprise, then, that Goldbacher’s governess is going to look and behave differently to the usual model.



Figs. 53. & 54. Rosina wears a crossover dress in shiny oiled cotton with a plunging neckline, and another version has a straight, low bodice with gauntlet sleeves, but both reveal a wide expanse of chemise.



As Rosina is escorted to her room after arriving for duty, she becomes worried about her ability to pass as a Protestant governess, and we hear her thoughts in a voiceover saying ‘I feel the word ‘Jewess’ must be emblazoned on my forehead. I am not like them. Oh Becca, how will I ever pass for a Mary Blackchurch?’

As an unmarried, middle-class woman, employed to teach the children of a wealthy family, a governess was often in a very isolated situation in a home where she was not the social equal of either her hosts or the other household servants. As explained by costume historian, Anne Hollander, a lone, grieving girl, pale in looks and draped in black mourning clothes, similar to the one depicted in the painting *The Governess* (by Richard Redgrave, 1844) (Fig. 55), was often viewed as an erotic subject (1993, p. 377) and was thus vulnerable to sexual predation in a situation where she was frequently friendless, homeless, and dependent on an income.



Fig. 55. *The Governess* or *The Poor Teacher* (1844) by Richard Redgrave.

Rosina wears a colour suitable for her role, but the contrasts between the delicate, white expanse of chemise and the shiny black casing of her dresses symbolize the risks involved in her disguise and suggest a vulnerability to exposure beneath an otherwise

resilient exterior. Trying to hurt her governess's feelings, Clementina betrays what her mother thinks about Rosina's costume and her 'dark looks' when she tells her 'Mama says you look like a black beetle.' Rosina reverses the intended insult and, beetle-like, crushes the little pest in her charge with a few choice words. However, the scene cuts to show the softer side of Rosina, divested of her black armour in the privacy of her own room, and sitting forlornly on the bed in her white nightwear. As she reaches to cover herself with her father's tallit, it seems more than a simple act of remembrance – clutching at the threads of her Jewish roots, she summons up all the religious and familial protection it can offer.

### **The Chemise and the Red Gown**

The froth of white chemise escaping from the black governess dress, however, also suggests that Rosina is a sensual creature, vulnerably emerging insect-like from a cocoon towards the next stage of her life as a fully-grown woman. Rosina will later shed her black dress, slipping it down over her arms and the length of her body to fully expose her chemise when she first takes Charles as her lover. It is also worth mentioning that the chemise has a long history in seductive portraiture due to its light, transparent weave that reveals and echoes sensual curves, and its tendency to gather and slip on the skin to casually expose a breast or shoulder (Figs. 56 and 57).



Fig. 56. *Flora* (1515-17) by Titian.

Fig. 57. *Boy bitten by a Lizard* (ca. 1595) by Caravaggio.

When Rosina is trying to come up with a suitable name to pass for a gentile, Benjamin suggests 'Flora' (see Fig. 56) then 'Magdalen' which turns out to be prophetic suggestion. Mary Magdalen was a disciple and friend of Jesus, who at some point became confused with other women in the Bible to become a figure of female sexuality in the form of a repentant prostitute. A typical, dramatic depiction of Mary Magdalen shows her 'weeping and praying in the wilderness, clad only in a bosom-revealing chemise or else voluptuously nude, wearing variously revealing rivers of hair' (Hollander 2002, p. 63) (Fig. 58), a form echoed by Rosina in her distressed state after Charles has rejected her (Fig. 59).



Fig. 58. *The Magdalen Weeping* (1606) by Caravaggio. Fig. 59. Mary sobbing after Charles' rejection.

Mary Magdalen is most often depicted with a red cloak, although occasionally it may be yellow (Figs. 60 and 61). An understanding of how these colours came to be associated with Jews is disclosed in Peter Bradshaw's analysis of the sensual use of the colour red in Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973) when he informs us that in sixteenth century Venice 'Jews were forced to wear red as a distinguishing mark, a law changed to yellow when it became clear that it made them too much like cardinals' (2011).



Fig. 60. *Penitent Mary*  
(1585) by El Greco.



Fig. 61. *Yellow Magdalen*  
(ca. 1615) by Artemesia Gentileschi.



Fig. 62. Rosina wears  
a red robe.

Thus, Rosina's red robe, loose hair and chemise (Fig. 62), that identify her as a Magdalen figure and a Jew, brings us to notice another layer of confusion that arises between Jewess, prostitute and actress in the scene where Rosina walks home from the synagogue. Stopping to look at a theatre poster of 'Rachel La Grande, Tragedienne, Jewess and Jewel of Paris' Rosina is accosted by two prostitutes, and one of them bares a breast at her, saying 'Oi, Jew girl. Want some lessons, Jew Girl?' (Fig. 63). Rosina braves the verbal assault, but when she gets a safe distance away, she boldly retorts with a mimicking gesture that 'underscores her worldliness' (ibid., p. 92) (Fig. 64). Lewin elegantly ties together the sensation produced by the Jewish tragedienne La Rachel, the stirring effect she had on writers such as George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, and how this may have influenced the Victorian actress Sarah Bernhardt, originally called Rosine (like Rosina), to acknowledge her Jewish heritage in her stage name (2008, pp. 91-92).



Fig. 63. Prostitutes accost Rosina.

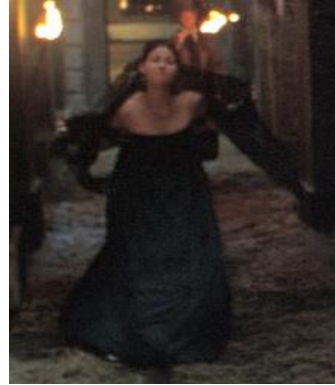


Fig. 64. Rosina replies with her own chest-baring gesture.

In this bare-breasted, chemise-off ‘face-off,’ working girl and wilful, theatrical Jewess come together to illustrate the real and imagined choices Rosina will soon be forced to make. Not long after her father’s death, Rosina is desperate to resist her mother’s attempts to marry her off. She protests to her sister ‘I won’t do it ... I’ll go on stage ... I’ll find any other way of making money.’ When Becca points out ‘But you can’t do anything’ Rosina says that she would ‘rather be a prostitute ... than become that fish merchant’s wife.’ The only other option available to a young woman like Rosina was to become a governess, and judging quite rightly that she can only achieve this disguised as a good Christian Mary and not a wayward Jewish Magdalen, she veils herself in the respectability of the Virgin and sets off to act out the part as best she can.

### **The Veil**

A veil has many loaded meanings, almost all of them contradictory and ambiguous in their disparate associations with innocence and danger, bride and concubine, and with

disguise, fetishism and exoticism. A veil also has liturgical meaning, symbolically separating a person from God and other humans, and screening sacred objects from public view. Again, all these qualities come into play in *The Governess*, where the veil conceals and reveals the dual identity of the naïve, churchgoing Mary and the sensuous Jewess, Rosina.

We first notice a white bridal-like veil in the hands of Mrs. Da Silva who is sewing a band of flowers into it as if in preparation for her daughter's wedding day, but instead she condemns Rosina for finding employment with the most unpleasant insults imaginable between mother and child. She accuses Rosina of being 'wanton and sluttish like Sofka' (the actress aunt), and that 'Going, showing yourself among Gentiles' will see her 'end up on the street,' that is as a prostitute. Stitched in anger and distress, this veil carries an amount of ill-boding in its threads, as it soon becomes the garment that wins Rosina favour with Charles, and forms the first physical connection between them (Fig. 65). Exhilarated by the discovery that saltwater will fix their photographs, they kneel together like husband and wife in communion with the wind and rock pools, as Rosina's veil whips around Charles' face and body.



Fig. 65. Rosina's veil whirls around in the wind by Charles.

Warming themselves with a whiskey back in the laboratory, the veil sits gathered on Rosina's lap as she speaks modestly of her admiration for his new ability to 'fix memory, fix people, lost people, in one's mind forever.' Charles asks her tenderly about people she has lost, at which point she becomes tearful for her father, and excusing herself she rushes off, dropping her veil. Charles reaches down to gather up the delicate embroidery, clearly moved and mystified by what has bound them together, and as the veil passes into his hands it signifies his willingness to see what more it will reveal of Rosina. It lies elegantly behind Rosina for their first hesitant kiss, and when they consummate their relationship Rosina covers herself in a veil of plain bridal silk that also suggests 'the veil of the hymen' (Buckley and Fawcett 2002, p. 34) (Fig. 66). Another layer of meaning may also lie in Rosina's suggestion to model for Cavendish as Queen Esther, since the name is derived from the Hebrew word *Hester* which can be interpreted as 'hiddenness' or 'veiled' thus mirroring Rosina's subterfuge. Lewin describes Rosina's subtle words of reassurance to Charles that 'the ancient Hebrews used to express love for each other entirely covered' as an intent 'to reveal who she really is amid the double masquerade' (2008, p. 95). Mary Ann Doane's assertion that the veil 'incarnates contradictory desires – the desire to bring [a woman] closer and the desire to distance her' (1991, p. 54) seems to come into effect almost immediately. Trying to detach himself from what has just happened, with his hand oddly resting on her throat, Charles asks 'My little Mary. Where did you learn such things?' In reply, she says 'You taught me to be an inventor' which is a witty cover story, under the circumstances.





Fig 66. Rosina covers herself with a veil when she first makes love with Charles.

The patterned veil next appears to show the affair becoming deeper and more daring as Rosina uses it to mesmerize Charles dressed as Salomé, the embodiment of the ‘sexually-available, aggressive, and potentially dangerous’ Jewess (Lewin 2007, p. 96). Then, in a montage sequence that epitomizes Meyers’ admiration for Goldbacher’s ability to show Jewish beauty (2008, p. 103) we see Rosina making a veil of her striped and tasseled shawl, her precious, would-be feminine tallit (Figs. 67, 68 and 69). Goldbacher’s portrayal of Rosina’s naked contours, that are caressed in the warp and weft of threads that inextricably tie her Jewish spirituality to her sensual loveliness, precede Leonard Nimoy’s 2002 photographic project ‘Shekhina’ that controversially portrayed glamorous women wrapped in tallitot.



Figs. 67, 68 and 69. Montage sequence shots with Rosina draped in her tasseled shawl.

The end of the affair comes, however, when Rosina unveils Charles. He has fallen asleep after lovemaking and in her wish to present him with a token of her deepest love she photographs him naked, as he has photographed her. However, he is furious with her for exposing him and ends it all. The veil she wears in her hair on her return journey, however, is a tartan one which shows that she does not leave Scotland untouched by the experience. Back amongst her family, in her own stylish clothes, and within a comfortable, richly curtained studio of her own, she finds her vocation serving her community under the veil of the eloquently red cloth of her camera, an alternative to the 'little tent' that may have bound her to a husband.

## **Conclusion**

The gorgeous red and gold fabrics that drape the Da Silva home portray a rich and loving environment in stark contrast to the emotionally-cold, bare surfaces and leached colours of castle Cavendish, and renders Rosina's passing from beloved Jewish daughter to friendless outsider amongst Gentiles more tangible and dreadful. Rosina's struggle to contain and conceal her Jewish identity finds expression in the froth of excessive white chemise that surfaces against the black carapace of her governess dress, and the imagery of contrasting hard and soft fabrics also symbolize her emerging sensuality. Alone in her room Rosina enfolds herself in a richly-striped shawl or a robe of Magdalen red to remind her of the spiritual comforts of home and family, and similarly when she is alone with Cavendish she introduces colour into the studio, acting out her theatrical and sexual

desires in the exotic Esther and Salomé tableaux. Ultimately, she reveals herself in her original Jewish clothing, and leaves the family to wallow in their own weaknesses and vanities.

The close attention paid to the tallit in the opening scene signals the necessity to concentrate our attention on a garment that offers multiple threads of meaning and purpose that weave in and out of the film. Rosina finds spiritual and physical comfort enfolded in her father's tallit, and within the folds of her feminine tallit she finds creativity and sensuality. When Rosina is betrayed by Cavendish emotionally and professionally, she finds consolation in the security of the tallit once more, but this time the little tent takes the form of a rich red velvet cloth at the back of her camera in a successful studio of her own.

Foreshadowing Meyer's admiration for Goldbacher's gaze that 'makes visible Jewish bodies and Jewish beauty' (2008, p. 103) Rosina says of her work 'My images are much admired and I am even to give a lecture at the Royal Society. They say I have captured the beauty of my father's people, and I am glad.' I think that Goldbacher's images should also be much admired, which from my point of view, are made breathtakingly beautiful through her expert handling of fabrics and costume that bring abundant layers of meaning to her film.

**Revealing Meaning in the Art and Textiles of Peter Webber's *Girl with A Pearl Earring* (2003)**

*Girl with a Pearl Earring* is a screen adaptation of Tracy Chevalier's 1999 novel that imagines the story behind Vermeer's famous portrait of 1665 (Fig. 70). Griet goes to work as a maid in the house of the painter Johannes Vermeer (Colin Firth). Gradually Griet takes on responsibilities in Vermeer's studio where master and young servant develop an understanding that causes jealousy and tension amongst other members of the household, particularly Vermeer's wife Catharina (Essie Davies) and daughter Cornelia (Alekina Mann). Vermeer's wealthy patron Van Ruijven (Tom Wilkinson) brings matters to a head by commissioning a portrait of Griet for his private collection (Fig. 71).



Fig. 70. *Girl with a Pearl Earring*  
(1665) by Johannes Vermeer



Fig. 71 Scarlett Johansson as Griet posing for  
Vermeer in *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003)

### **Further similarities of themes in *The Piano*, *The Governess* and Webber's *Girl With A Pearl Earring***

Griet (*Girl*), Ada (*The Piano*) and Rosina (*The Governess*) are all forced by economic necessity to leave the security of home and family to join a strange, new household where they are not entirely welcome. Although Ada enters her new situation as a married woman the effect of her arrival is not dissimilar to that of Rosina and Griet who each become the focus of the resident females' insecurities as rival males compete for the new girl's affections. Ada, Rosina and Griet each take on additional, creative tasks at their master's bidding, as a piano tutor, a photographic assistant, and an artist's assistant respectively, in rooms from which other members of the household are excluded, thus evoking notions of *Bluebeard*-ian sexual intrigue. All three films are also concerned with

looking – looking at someone, being looked at, returning the look, and the art of *really* looking at something to uncover meaning.

The historical accuracy of the costumes in each of the three films comes into question for various reasons, including the sexualisation of Ada's crinoline dresses in *The Piano* (Bruzzi 1997, p. 35); the implausible fabrics and designs used for the governess outfits in *The Governess* (Valentine, 2009); and the ruffle-free, pared-down, 'period Prada' look of the costumes demanded by the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*'s director to spare his audience a film that was 'too costumey' (Weddle, 2004). None of these designs are erroneous, but instead give us clues about each of the characters. For Rosina, the 'wrong' cut and fabric expose her mistaken belief that she could pass as a Gentile, and further put her in danger of predation and suspicion. For Ada and Rosina, the tightness of their formal clothing, from which they ultimately break free, is a sensuous way of expressing their transition towards self-fulfilment.

*The Piano* and *The Governess* make many allusions to works of art that inform and enrich the presentation of textiles in each film. *The Piano* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* each have very significant washing line sequences. However, a close study of the

paintings and the painterliness of *Girl*, and of its noteworthy use of clotheslines which reveal a struggle intent on spoiling purity and innocence, is of special interest here.

### **Paintings and Painterliness in *Girl with a Pearl Earring***

*Girl* received wide praise for looking visually ‘ravishing’ (McCarthy 2003), ‘sumptuous’ (Davis 2003) and ‘painterly’ (Bradshaw 2004) and Philip French is impressed by its artistic credentials:

The landscapes are out of Hobbema. The stern, black-dressed mother-in-law looks as if she has posed for Rembrandt or Hals. The interiors and exteriors of Delft resemble paintings by Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch and their contemporaries brought to life. (2004)

But what is the appeal to viewers of recognizable art references? In a study of Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* (1957) James Monaco argues that its references to medieval art and literature captures a sense of ‘elite artistic culture ... readily appreciated by intellectual audiences’ (2009 p. 345). Alternatively, as can be seen in *Barry Lyndon* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1975) the director’s vision was to create the painterly look of the eighteenth-century through careful reference to nineteenth-century art.

I suggest that in addition to film-buffs there is a sub-group of dedicated art-spotting film buffs who find it rewarding and enjoyable to learn that Griet and Tanneke were directed to create tableaux from paintings such as ‘Praying Before the Meal’ by Jan Steen, ‘The Dutch Cook’ by Gerard Dou, ‘A Room in a Dutch House’ by Pieter Janssens Elinga, and

‘The Cook’ by Giuseppe Maria Crespi which are shown in quick succession alongside stills of Griet and Tanneke placed in similar poses (DVD, 2004).

In common with *The Piano* and *The Governess*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* also refers to many examples of textiles in works of fine art, which add layers of validity and meaning to the costumes and fabrics in each film. As a biopic of an artist of the Dutch Golden Age, *Girl* could easily have been rejected by those not normally interested in art, but its release took place amidst ‘a literal Vermeer craze’ in fiction, film and poetry (Seiger Eidt, 2006) thus making it more accessible as a subject of popular culture.

The director and his team went to enormous lengths to recreate the look and feel of the Vermeer house and neighbourhood, and at all stages of this process textiles are an important and integral part of the bigger, painterly picture. In a commentary to accompany *Girl*’s DVD release, Webber, a former student of Art History, describes the great pleasure of ‘being able to plunge oneself into the world of a master painter’ and the fun he and the Producer, Andy Paterson, had ‘doing their [art] homework’ (2004). For example, they took the actors and crew to The Mauritshuis in The Hague to study some of the paintings in the film at first hand; Firth was taught the art of preparing pigments at a historic paint mill and Webber had two artists continually on set who were either instructing Firth or painting canvases for different scenes; experts of the camera obscura were consulted to check that the images shown were of the correct shape and distortion;



and period-correct flawed glass was made up in the style of the windows in Vermeer paintings for the studio and feast scenes.

Webber readily admits that the scene where Griet and Pieter walk in the country is ‘very much a Hobemma, one of my favourite Dutch landscape painters’ and describes solving the problem of filming fifteen people at a table in the feast scene by studying the arrangement of the disciples in Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of *The Last Supper* (1495-1498). Even ‘art-history gags’ find their way into the film, for the simple reason that ‘These little things make us happy’ (ibid.). Webber explains the first visual joke as referring to Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* which shows Griet, a mere maid, passing a paint pot to the master painter (Fig. 72). The second gag is seen towards the end of the film when a small package is delivered to Griet and the light falls on her from the right- hand side as opposed to all of Vermeer’s work which is lit from the left (ibid.).



Fig. 72. Griet passes Vermeer a jar of white paint.

Unusually for a built set, the Vermeer house was genuinely constructed as a three-storey building to give a real sense of the differences in light and colour between the family’s living quarters on the gloomy ground floor, and the brighter, airier studio rooms above. The scriptwriter, Olivia Hetreed, observes how Vermeer and Griet shed their inhibitions, and Vermeer his clothes, in the higher reaches of the house where nobody else goes

(ibid.). Further allusions to their mutual attraction are illustrated as they brush up against each other's clothing and fabrics when they find themselves alone. For example, we see Vermeer in his shirtsleeves working alongside Griet in the attic grinding pigment. As mentioned in *The Governess* chapter (p. 93), in the past a shirt was worn as an item of underwear, so Vermeer's closeness to Griet in a state of undress places them in intimate proximity usually reserved for husband and wife. The additional connection of the eroticised image of Firth in his wet shirt in *Pride and Prejudice* adds further to the frisson between artist and girl. Other intimate moments that evoke lovemaking include Vermeer and Griet huddled together in a rosy glow under the covers of his robe on the pretext of looking through the camera obscura, and the moment when he wraps Griet in the sleeves of his shirt to pierce her ear. Apart from Catharina, whose clothes always include a splash of bright colour, or Maria Thins' long, black dresses of the deepest black with contrasting white collars, the other members of the household all wear items of natural, earthy hues and textures. The occasional change of costume is subtle and often hard to detect, which helps to instil the idea that the family was short of money, but as Paterson, explains it was incredibly useful for continuity purposes that 'everyone always looks the same' (ibid.). The crowd scenes in the market, in church and even at the feast have characters mostly wearing muted browns, blues and greens, except for the occasional extra dressed in a splash of red or pink, a technique widely used in painting to provide a focal point in a busy scene.

Ilan Safit's study of the visual adaptation of *Girl* considers how pictures within pictures, including maps and mirrors, were used by Vermeer and his contemporaries to take the viewer's imagination to other spheres, also predicts cinema's 'numerous points of view

and the possibility of movement between them' (2006). Webber also uses paintings within the film frame to offer further threads of meaning to a scene, as seen for example, when Griet is ordered by Maria Thins (Judy Parfitt) to go on an errand to Van Ruijven. Placed to the right of the doorway where Griet stands is the first in a series of paintings used to mirror Griet's hopeless situation – Fabritius' *The Goldfinch*<sup>16</sup> (Fig. 73) which portrays a beautiful wild bird chained to its perch.



Fig. 73. *The Goldfinch* (1654) by Carel Fabritius

At this point, it is also worth mentioning a semiotic link between the parrot in the Vermeer house and the popularity of the tropical bird in many Dutch genre paintings, for example *A Young Woman in a Red Jacket Feeding a Parrot* by Frans Van Mieris The

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<sup>16</sup> Vermeer was also an art dealer and the owner of many paintings of quality. Fabritius's master was Rembrandt, and although there is no firm evidence to support the claim, it is often thought that Fabritius was Vermeer's master.

Elder (c.1660). Imported from the Dutch colonies, parrots were very fashionable in the seventeenth century as their skills of mimicry reflected on the owner a sign of learning. However, their exotic appearance and the word *vogelen*, which translates as ‘to catch birds’ or ‘to fornicate,’ added an element of sexual intrigue to a painting. There are several moments in the film when the parrot is in frame at the same moment as the relationship between Griet and Vermeer is under scrutiny. For instance, the pregnant Catharina, who has not set foot in Vermeer’s studio since a furious argument, leads Griet past the parrot on the way up to the studio where she is to attend to the artist’s needs; when Vermeer takes Griet’s side in the incident of the stolen comb he tears past the squawking parrot; the bird is behind Van Ruijven as he deliberately stirs up Catharina’s jealousy regarding Griet and Vermeer’s activities in the overhead studio; and finally the parrot and Tanneke stare accusingly at Griet when she is banished from the house.

There are two more paintings featured in the film that reap the rewards of closer study in respect of Griet’s fate: Vermeer’s *The Girl with a Wine Glass* (c.1659) (Fig. 74) and Dirck van Baburen’s *The Procuress* (1622) (Fig. 75). When Griet first encounters Van Ruijven he receives her in the privacy of his study where every surface is covered with objets d’art and paintings. As decided by Tracy Chevalier, and accepted by the art establishment (DVD, 2014), Van Ruijven tells Griet that he is the man in the painting leaning over his former maid in *Girl with a Wine Glass*. Instructing Griet to study the

painting, Van Ruijven revels in her mortification at his improper descriptions of the model and her costume. Leering at Griet, he says:

Look at that dress.

You can almost stroke the satin ...

Can you imagine yourself in such finery, Griet?

She loved it, you know.

Lace and satin pressed tight against her plump little bubbies.

The silk, heavy on her thighs ...



Fig. 74. *The Girl with a Wine Glass* (ca.1659) by Johannes Vermeer

Van Ruijven's lustful interpretation of the girl and her dress warns Griet and the viewer about what it means to be a girl in one of his paintings – for the price of a red dress she will be subjected to the Van Ruijven's sexual demands and ogled over and defamed by others, as illustrated in the scene that follows. Tanneke and Griet are at work in the Vermeer kitchen, where the older maid 'echoes the lasciviousness of Van Ruijven's advances' as she slaps lard onto the flesh of a brace of pheasants, saying '[He] poured

wine down her like he was forcing a goose. That dress can't have stayed on long. She was carrying his by-blow<sup>17</sup> before the painting was dry.' In a scene that is cut from the film, we see the girl from the wine glass painting looking down-at-heel in her now-tattered red dress, clutching a baby. Chevalier also confirms that Tanneke was quite possibly the model for Vermeer's painting 'The Milkmaid' that is seen hanging in Van Ruijven's study (ibid.). Although no further information is given about Tanneke's portrait, her distinctly off-white, less-than-pure chemise may be a small hint that she may also have been another of Van Ruijven's girls. Either way, we get the picture that Van Ruijven's appetite for paintings and maids puts Griet dangerously in the frame for his next commission.

For the art-appreciating cinephile, Webber also weaves an enticing element of art history into his film, bringing another dimension to the narrative. Baburen's *The Procuress* is an example of a *bordeeltje* (little brothel) scene, a category of Dutch genre painting extremely popular in Vermeer's time that shows an older woman procuring a client for a young prostitute under her control.

As in *The Girl with a Wine Glass* above, the clothes in a painting give the viewer an insight into the character and destiny of different figures. Here, Baburen's *Procuress* is on the right wearing an earthy-looking cloak and an untidy turban. Her eyes are fixed on a gold coin in the hand of the man with a hunter's feather in his cap. His arm reaches

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<sup>17</sup> An illegitimate child.

around the young woman, resting on her satiny sleeve, his thumb inching towards her décolleté.



Fig. 75. *The Procuress* (1622) by Dirck van Baburen

Vermeer also made his own version of *The Procuress* (1656) (Fig. 76), in which Vermeer expert, Arthur J. Wheelock, identifies the grinning figure on the left, next to the procuress in black, as the artist's self-portrait (1997, p. 14).



Fig. 76. *The Procuress* (1656) by Johannes Vermeer

Ilan Safit's study on the visual adaptation of *Girl* suggests that the characters in this version of the painting may be identified as follows:

Maria Thins, the painter's mother-in-law, as the procurress; Vermeer's patron, Van Ruijven, as the soldier; Griet as the pandered girl; and Vermeer as 'himself.' In the adaptation of this image into verbal and cinematic narrative, Maria Thins orchestrates the transaction by which Griet is delivered to Van Ruijven's desire through the agency and under the gaze of Vermeer. (2006, p. 54)

What interests me in this painting, apart from how the clothes may have informed the look of Webber's characters, is the bottom half of the painting. Here, a richly-patterned oriental rug and a fur coat with shiny buttons dominates the picture plane, displaying the artist's meticulous skill in the portrayal of every thread and hair on the surface the textiles. I believe it is from paintings such as this that the director himself finds inspiration to channel his own artistry in a film that equally draws attention to the fine detail of its fabrics.

Finally, Griet's position by the Baburen *Procurress* comes into play when Vermeer interrupts her at her chores to tell her that he has finally agreed to a commission from Van Ruijven to paint her portrait for his collection (Fig. 77). Griet stops sweeping and is caught in light that half-illuminates her face and simple working clothes, and which also seeps onto the girl in the otherwise-dark canvas behind her. Thus, it is clear to see the parallel between the implicit procurement of Griet for Van Ruijven against the explicit transaction in the painting.





Fig. 77. Griet learns she is to be painted for Van Ruijven.

Baburen's *Procuress* behind her mirrors her predicament.

### **Drapery and Curtains**

In another creative display of his knowledge of seventeenth-century art, we find Webber employing a professional Set Draper (Annett Golinski), a highly-skilled specialist in the art of draping curtains and textiles, to authenticate the look of the Vermeer house in keeping with that period of Dutch painting. The Hunterian Art Gallery lists Curtain Painting as a distinct category within its collection of Dutch works, which were popular for their trompe l'oeil qualities. The paintings were of two different types, either of a theatrically draped swag pulled or knotted to one side, or a pulled-back curtain hanging from a rod running parallel to the top of the painting (Fig. 78).



Fig. 78. *Vase of Flowers with a Curtain* (1615)

by Jacques de Gheyn II.



Fig. 79. *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open*

*Window* (ca. 1657) by Vermeer.

The descriptions of the curtains in Vermeer's painting *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* (ca. 1657) (Fig. 79) helps to explain how they function:

Observed carefully, the curtain does not belong to the implied space of the three-dimensional room. It hovers slightly over the painted surface hung from a curtain rod. In real Dutch households, this kind of curtain was frequently employed to protect precious paintings from dust or for covering nudes... It was a favourite among the *fijnschilders* (*fine painters*) like Frans van Mieris or Gerrit Dou of Leiden whose goal was to paint works so realistic that they could not be distinguished from reality. (Essential Vermeer online catalogue)

By comparison, the curtains in *The Piano* are mostly light and airy and suited for the theme of shadow play that runs through the film, and those in *The Governess* are ornate and heavy to show the cocooning affluence of the De Silva family home. However, the drapes in *Girl* are used in a similar way to those in *Curtain painting*, where they are tied back on one side to draw the eye into a scene or to separate one space from another. For

example, a heavy green curtain is pulled to one side to dramatize the moment when Griet tentatively enters Vermeer's studio for the first time (Fig. 80), leaving Catharina and Cornelia on the other side of the space it divides (Fig. 81).



Fig. 80. Griet enters Vermeer's studio for the first time.



Fig 81. Catharina and Cornelia peer around the curtain, but are not allowed to enter.

The green curtain creates a boundary between the gloom of the family rooms in the rest of the house and the pure light and atmosphere of the studio. As Griet ventures further into the studio space we see her pass behind another pale curtain to appear again on the

far side of the studio by the windows (Fig. 82), thus transforming from her below-stairs persona into someone with greater responsibilities.



Fig. 82. Griet opens the shutters to let light flood into the studio.

Absorbed in her work, Griet turns to look at a painting, and the framing of her head and shoulders against the white drape accentuates her sense of her peace and happiness in the quiet studio. A dramatic sweep of another curtain nearby makes Griet jump out of her reveries, revealing the matriarch of the house, Maria Thins (Judy Parfitt). In her black skullcap and white ruff, she has the appearance of a Rembrandt figure painting. Added to this, she has a way of appearing unexpectedly and hovering with an eerie presence that Webber found in the character of Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) in *Rebecca*, a film he says he watched three or four times in preparation for *Girl* (DVD, 2014).

Webber reveals the extent of his own cinephile credentials, for example, as he mentions watching *The Earrings of Madame De* (dir. Max Ophüls, 1953) many times ‘as the only other good film about jewellery I could think of’ and of also trying to find a ‘good bonnet film’ which led him to Kelly McGillis’s character in *Witness* (dir. Peter Weir, 1985)

(ibid.). He also refers to the biggest close-ups of the film where Vermeer gets Griet to lick her lips for the portrait which he describes as an ‘erotic gunfight’ in ‘mini-homage’ to Sergio Leone and which is also reminiscent of the photo shoot montage scene in *Funny Face* (dir. Stanley Donen, 1957) where the model Jo Stockton (Audrey Hepburn) is directed by Dick (Fred Astaire) to look bereft with the words: ‘Now Jo, gimme the works: heartbreak, longing, tragedy. Wet your lips.’ Webber also proudly describes his ‘*Barry Lyndon* moment’ in a scene set outside the Vermeer house at night when four wall-mounted torches and the glow from the windows gently illuminate Van Ruijven’s arrival to the feast (ibid.). Movie blogger Allan Fish also notices this link, admiring *Girl* for its lighting ‘that probably ranks amongst the greatest since Kubrick and Alcott’s *Barry Lyndon*’ (2010). I would suggest that we see Kubrick’s influence in more than this one moment. For example, the fixed camera positions that linger on works of art in *Barry Lyndon* that put the viewer in the position of a gallery-goer is another concept embraced by Webber in *Girl*.

Three quick scenes after Maria Thins has made herself known to Griet, when all the characters have been introduced except one, another dramatic swish of the green curtain reveals a mysterious glimpse of Vermeer in near-darkness (Fig. 83). He stares moodily at

Griet before disappearing once more into the recesses of the house thus emphasizing the inviolable distance between master and maid.



Fig. 83. Vermeer is first revealed to Griet and the audience through the dramatic parting of a curtain.

### **Griet's Hair**

Hair is included in this study in keeping with Hollander's view of 'hair as erotic drapery' in paintings 'from Botticelli to Beardsley' (1993, p 74). In conversation with Hetreed, Chevalier refers to the 'biblical notion of the woman's sexuality being in her hair' which until as recently as the beginning of twentieth century required women to cover their hair in public (DVD, 2014).

At all times, Griet wears a modest white cap which entirely covers her hair and part of her face. As Griet goes about her chores, it is noticeable that the camera focuses on the detail of her sleeves, cap and apron and often her head is completely out of shot (Figs. 84, 85 and 86). This has the effect of making her seem less like a young woman with

thoughts and feelings of her own and more like an extra pair of hands tasked with cleaning up someone else's dirt.



Figs. 84, 85 and 86. Griet's face is out of shot as she hangs out laundry, scrubs the step and dusts a map.

In an attempt at intimacy, Griet's suitor, Pieter, tries to persuade her to show him her hair but she resists even his questions about its appearance, flinching and crying 'No!' when he touches the back of her head. Later, as Vermeer embarks on her portrait, Griet refuses to remove her cap for him and only agrees to show more of her face by finding another decorative cloth in which to wrap her hair. As she does this, her hair falls around her shoulders and she catches sight of Vermeer spying on her, an act described by Chevalier as making Griet feel 'as if she's lost her virginity' (ibid.). The sense of transgression is given greater emphasis as the scene cuts to Van Ruijven in the room below saying to Catharina that he has 'a mind to go up there ... and surprise him – in the act.' As events spiral out of control, Griet's resolve to have some small control over her situation sees her dragging Pieter out of a tavern to make love to her, yet still she keeps her cap on.

### **Griet and her lines of washing**

Griet is shown at her domestic work sweeping, dusting, mopping, cleaning windows, cleaning silver, scrubbing the step, cleaning out the fire, running errands, shopping,

fetching water, helping in the kitchen and serving at the table. All these tasks are covered briefly in contrast to the amount of time dedicated to showing her working at the bubbling coppers in the washing kitchen and outside in the yard tending to the family's lines of washing, which in total take up approximately eight-and-a-half minutes of a ninety-five minute-long feature, a significant 8.9% of the total film. Webber clearly relished this part of the process, saying:

We shot an awful lot of this. It was fascinating ... like doing a documentary in a seventeenth century laundry ... and you'd fall in love with the material but then you have to remember that there's an audience out there ... and chop it back and chop it back. And that's what a lot of the editing process is about – falling back out of love with your material so you can turn it back into a story.' (ibid.)

Fortunately, plenty of material survived, and the many lines of washed linens are used time and again to focus attention on Griet's constant entanglement in the family's jealousies and desires. Since ancient times, clean white linen has been a symbol of religious purity. For example, Plutarch records the wearing of sacred white linens by the priests of Isis; and Leviticus 16:14 records the garments worn by the High Priest on The Day of Atonement:

He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These



are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. (New International Version Bible)

Linens were highly valued family treasures in seventeenth century Holland that were safeguarded in locked chests and bequeathed through the generations in dowries or wills. The predominantly female duty of caring for these linens was consequently of great importance in homes where the idea that 'cleanliness is next to godliness' prevailed.

In *The Embarrassment of Riches* Simon Schama puts forward a case to present the Dutch as a people engaged in a moral war against dirt (1987, pp. 381-388). This view is countered by the economic historians Bas Van Bavel and Oscar Gelderblum who present a more prosaic case for the high levels of cleanliness in seventeenth-century Dutch households as originating from the standards of hygiene required in traditional cheese and butter production. However, they concede the point that it was 'quite possible that Calvinist beliefs strengthened the urge to clean in the Golden Age' and credit Schama for producing 'compelling evidence from several visual and literary sources that link the physical act of cleaning to the spiritual purity of Dutch women in the Golden Age' (2009, pp. 41-69). Also, in the same period, a draper called Antonie van Leeuwenhoek was on the verge of making an important scientific discovery that was based on cleanliness and linens. Born in Delft in the same year as Vermeer, and thought to have been his friend, Leeuwenhoek made improvements to microscope lenses that were used to inspect linen quality in his trade. The unforeseen result of his vastly-improved lenses made him the

‘father of microbiology’ when he became the first person to observe and describe microorganisms and bacteria.

Chris Elmore’s review of Chevalier’s novel is illuminating in its observations of the ‘striking ... frequent’ references to cleanliness and neatness that are recreated in the film:

For Griet, the strict observation of her washing, cleaning and tidying rituals is as much moral as material. They are the only means that an unmarried, slightly vulnerable and yet sexually aware young woman of the time could use to feel reassured of her own moral purity and social worth. This need for reassurance is important to Griet. She works and moves in a culture that sees the domestic maid as a mischief maker, a potential breaker of marital bonds, a sexual temptress, and a force for tracking the dirt and dross of the street into the tranquility and moral order of the marital home. (2002)

Webber admits that the idea for the outdoor arrangement of drying sheets ‘is stolen from the Cocteau film *Beauty and The Beast*, one of my favourite films’ (DVD, 2014).

Cocteau’s magnificent washing lines (discussed in *The Piano* chapter), made up of row upon row of huge white sheets that are used very much like theatre curtains for the characters to sweep through in dramatic entrances and exits, are also designed as a place where reality and enchantment can meet. Whilst Webber takes inspiration from Cocteau’s

design to conceal and reveal characters and their actions behind swathes of fabric, his version is more suspenseful and menacing in a configuration that exposes the linens and Griet alike to the threat of damage and disenchantment. The following scenes illustrate Griet's practical and personal struggles in and around the laundry.

When Griet first arrives for duty at the Vermeer's house, her help is clearly needed by the look of the few limp garments hanging in the yard, and the door into the kitchen shows it to be in disarray. Griet is soon hard at work boiling linens, scrubbing a pile of clothes and clearly taking a pride in bringing order out of chaos. Her efforts, however, go unnoticed and her confidence is quickly eroded when she bids her mistress good morning only to be met with a disdainful stare and a reprimand not to speak until spoken to. Cornelia, a smaller, more spiteful version of her mother, takes Catharina's lead to lord it over the new maid and makes her life a misery. On a fine day when Griet is in the yard cleaning the silver by lines of washed sheets, a game the children are playing turns sour when Vermeer is disturbed at his work and he shouts down to silence Cornelia. When an older sister takes the little ones inside, Cornelia disappears silently behind the sheets and, suspecting some mischief, Griet follows after her. The camera shows us a look of

disbelief on Griet's face and then does a reverse shot to reveal the shocking sight of a clean sheet smeared with filth and Cornelia's mud-covered hand running down its surface (Fig. 87). When Griet slaps the girl in anger it marks the start of a campaign by Cornelia to drag the new maid's name through the dirt.



Fig. 87. Cornelia's hand smears dirt on a sheet.

The next time Griet is seen attending to the washing it is snowing and the linens hang stiffly on the line. Shivering and hunched against the cold, Griet taps twice onto Vermeer's shirt, which has frozen 'like a scarecrow' (DVD, 2014) or a spectre (Fig. 88), making it apparent that it is not just the women of the family who have left her out in the

cold, but that she is destined to be cold-shouldered by the icy-hearted master of the house.



Fig. 88. Griet attends to the linens in freezing temperatures.

On another occasion when Cornelia and her older sister play skittles in the yard and Griet unpegs clothes from the line, Tanneke tells her that Catharina is expecting another baby. Sitting under the family linens, trying to take in what this means, Griet is cruelly reminded of her lowly place in the affairs of the family, and is wounded that any amount of intimacy or attachment formerly shown to her by Vermeer is clearly of no real consequence. Finally, in a scene foretold by Maria Thins about being caught in the web of Van Ruijven's patronage, Griet is caught off-guard as she tends to the laundry outside. A magpie calls out in warning and a distant bell tolls as Van Ruijven slips furtively out of the back door like a big brown spider to catch Griet behind the maze of hanging sheets. In a sustained verbal and physical assault, he torments her with sexual innuendo whilst gripping her by the throat (Fig. 89) before forcing her into a corner where he rips at her

clothes, clearly intent on rape. At the last moment Griet is spared the ordeal when Catharina calls out for her, and Van Ruijven scuttles back into the house.



Fig. 89. Vermeer traps Griet in the line of washing.

Thus, Griet's clean, drying linens that are spoilt by dirt, cold and other assaults provide the perfect visual metaphor for the injuries and attacks visited upon Griet's hard work and innocent character.

## **Conclusion**

Interviewer Nik Huggins gets to the heart of Webber's filmmaking technique when he asks the director if there is a similarity between his process and that of an artist applying layers and layers of fine oil paint to a canvas (2004). 'Completely,' Webber agrees. 'Sometimes you have blinding flashes of inspiration but mostly it's just strong, slow and steady processes as you gather everything you need to create the world.' And, as Mark Leeper suggests, 'a familiarity with Vermeer's paintings in general and with *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* in particular is not necessary, but it does improve the enjoyment of the film (2004).

The success of Webber's feast scene that comes from Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and his idea for Griet's washing lines inspired from Cocteau's *Beauty and The*

*Beast*, for example, will surely appeal to the art-loving cinephile. As someone who appreciates textiles in art and cinema, I am particularly taken with the idea that Webber used someone in the role of film Draper to dress *Girl's* set in accordance with the conventions of illusion and space seen in seventeenth-century curtain painting. I also appreciate his Vermeer-like attention to textile detail, as seen in the rug and fur coat of *The Procuress*, to fill the screen with fine attention to the authentic colours, texture and form of seventeenth-century fabrics.

Webber masters the sense of ruin that hangs over Griet in her attempts to ward off dirty attacks on her washing and her person from those that seek to dominate her. He is, however, willing to admit that his personal passion to portray, for instance, a detailed domestic chore undertaken in the deepest level of darkness or with the slowest pull back shot possible needs to be balanced against an audience's patience and goodwill (DVD 2014). In keeping with the Kubrick's technique in *Barry Lyndon*, I believe that one of the best pieces of advice about how to enjoy *Girl* is to appreciate its 'art gallery hush, [because] it is just so ambitious, and intriguing, and beautiful, you will find yourself immobile in front of its canvas, drinking in the details' (Bradshaw, 2004).

## Conclusion

Happy childhood memories of hanging out the washing, the influence of idealistic washing-powder advertising and an appreciation of fabrics and drapery in art initially created in my mind a romanticised image of the clothesline and its textiles as a symbol of goodness and purity that I was keen to explore and recreate in my film work. However, the search to understand the line of washing and its contents as fully as possible through the study of its many examples in cinema reveals a more compelling picture of it being used as a prop around which narratives of division, discord and dissent find expression in power struggles between genders, classes and cultures. This study thus considers the paradox of the washing line as an object of uplifting beauty alongside its tendency in cinema to become a place where trouble and strife converges.

Several strands of research are used in the thesis, namely my three case studies and the analysis of the use of costume, cloth and clothes; a wider study of washing lines and their role in cinema; and my own practice. These threads weave together to find new ways of understanding layers of meaning in clothes, costumes, textiles and washing-lines, as well as filming them. Searching for ways of enhancing the content of short, art films through an investigation of three big-budget productions may seem unorthodox, but in fact this interface has allowed me to uncover many things that would otherwise have remained elusive by offering a wide range of material that has helped to support, clarify and develop many of the ideas I have previously grappled with in my practice. Analyses of the cloth and clothing in the films under discussion by experts in Fashion Studies and Film Costume have taught me to be as alert to the detailed, subtle and often subversive



information given in costumes, as I am to the nuances of the line of washing. For instance, my preoccupation concerning the significance of textiles as the bearers of memories and emotions that enfold and protect a person through all stages of life from birth to death finds verification in the recurring imagery of tallitot in *The Governess*. From the opening moments of the film when a lingering close-up of shot of a tallit widens to show a congregation of men at prayer, each wearing a tallit, and Rosina's eyes are attracted to the sensuous young neck of her intended husband above his tallit, it suggests that we would do well to focus our attention on the garment that will comfort and sustain Rosina spiritually and emotionally on her journey into exile and back again. We see the tallit at moments of intense pain, grief and sadness but, as in the pivotal scene where Rosina enacts a lonely Seder wrapped in her father's tallit, it also brings her solace and helps her to anticipate and realize a future where she will find desire, love, creativity and purpose. For those wishing to analyse cloth, clothes and textiles in cinema, and also for those wanting to film them, Goldbacher's exquisite imagery, that reveals every thread and knot in the warp and weft of a tallit that lifts and sways to the sound of man's chanting voice, offers a perfect model and metaphor for constructing the thread of an idea that will weave in and out of a story.

Another persistent concern in my investigations and practice that considers the way pure, white linens displayed on a line of a washing often attract adverse attention, has benefitted from a close study of Griet's lines of washing in *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. Chris Elmore's study of Chevalier's book brings to light the idea that Griet's stringent cleaning rituals reflect her own efforts to prove her moral purity and social worth at a

time when servant girls were regarded as troublemakers who contaminated a household with the dirt and scandal they brought in from the streets outside (2002). Peter Webber admits to stealing the idea for the clotheslines in *Girl* from one of his favourite films, *Beauty and the Beast* (2004), but where Cocteau used his sheets in curtain-like arrangements to produce dramatic entrances and exits, or to project deep, distorted shadow play, Webber uses his for more sinister and ominous purposes. Griet's goodness and diligence, epitomised by her strict laundry rituals, is constantly undermined by the jealous mistress of the house, and her spiteful daughter Cornelia, who on one occasion smears filth all over a drying sheet to make more work for Griet. In another scene, Vermeer's patron sneaks between the laundry lines to pounce on the unsuspecting maid, thus connecting the idea of the purity of the clean washing with Griet's virginity and Van Ruijven's attempts to despoil her.

In the development of Rosina's character in *The Governess*, and of Ada's in *The Piano*, one of the ways that we see their passage to emotional, sexual and creative experience is through the way their clothing gradually becomes looser, dirtier and discarded. Initially, the tight, and overtight clothes worn by Ada and Stuart respectively in *The Piano*, appear to be historically- and morally-correct Victorian costume, but on closer inspection they signify the sexual tension between husband and wife. Stuart's costumes, which were deliberately made a size smaller than necessary (Bruzzi 1997) make him appear always uncomfortable, uptight and barely able to contain his frustrated desire for Ada. Ada's rigid corsets and crinolines, tight bodices and voluminous skirts, however, allow her to keep her husband at a distance. Similarly, Rosina's governess costume, which is

remarkably unlike those worn in the usual productions of her more famous Christian counterpart, Jane Eyre, makes it possible to interpret its bizarre cut and fabric as a deliberate ploy to add to the unease and suspicion her 'dark looks' have already aroused in the Cavendish family.

As seen in *The African Queen* and then in *The Piano*, Campion takes inspiration from Rose's deteriorating costume to show Ada's clothes also become as dirty, dishevelled and undone as those of their male counterparts. Thus, the abandonment of clean, tight clothes can be used to illustrate the shedding of inhibition and a willingness to engage with a sexual partner. Similarly, in *The Governess*, Rosina rolls in the dirt on a leafy bank, kneels in saltwater pools and gets her hands dirty working for Cavendish in his studio in the run up to casting off her severe governess clothes to seduce him. By contrast, Griet's efforts to stay in control of her honour are reflected in her unfailingly neat, clean, modest dress and her constant efforts to keep the house and its linens pristine.

The idea that dirtied, loosened clothes signal a moral shift in a character's formerly constrained emotional or sexual behaviour heightens my awareness, understanding and engagement with this potent trope in other films, and inspires me to experiment with the concept in my own work. Additionally, it helped me to detect a similar phenomenon with the clothesline in cinema, which is frequently transformed from a pristine state to become ruffled, ripped or ruined through perilous weather conditions or malicious human acts in expression of feelings that are running high or out of control.

### Clotheslines in cinema

As seen in the dazzling clothesline arrangements in *Billy Elliot*, *Bright Star*, *Everything is Illuminated*, *Hairspray* and *Suffragette*, vast amounts of linens are strung across communal yards or open ground to create a spectacle around which the unfolding dramas of family problems and conflict are illuminated and underlined. These larger-than-life structures create an aesthetic that allows the viewer to become immersed in a range of feelings evoked, for example, in: fantasy sequences that offer characters escape from a humdrum existence; nostalgic scenes that evoke simpler, more innocent times; or suspense sequences that use the linens to conceal or reveal the hunted and the hunter. Accordingly, the wider study of clotheslines and their textiles in cinema generates three areas of particular interest in theory and practice: as a signifier of female space and of class and cultural difference; as a sign of danger or a portent of death; and of how art inspires and enhances the look of on-screen textiles and lines of washing.

### The Clothesline as a signifier of female space, class and culture

Washing lines in cinema often reflect the idea that it is possible to ‘read’ a clothesline to garner information about the socio-economic status of its owner. For example, in *The Draughtsman’s Contract* the genteel displays of linens drying in elegant arrangements over aromatic hedges behind a grand house show that its owners have plenty of land and servants to serve their needs. By contrast, the communal washing lines shared by poor communities in *Suffragette* or *The Commitments* highlight the impoverished means and choices of individuals in those communities.

Although clotheslines appear in many recent films, mostly they are used as shorthand to create a rosy picture of the past that glosses over many of the real-life difficulties experienced by women for whom it hard, tedious work, as can be seen for example in *Big Fish*, *Meek's Cutoff* and *Ray*. Apart from a few films like *Mamma Mia!* and *The Bourne Ultimatum*, both set in clothesline-friendly Mediterranean countries, or *The Way, Way Back* set in a seaside resort in Massachusetts where city inhibitions are cast aside for towels and beachwear to dry on summery lines, it is much rarer to find clotheslines in contemporary film settings. Possibly, this reflects a trend that has developed since the introduction of electric clothes dryers, where those who can afford to run and house such energy-hungry appliances look down on those who cannot, and thus equate outdoor drying as an unwelcome sign of poor or alien communities. This is seen most clearly in the phenomenon of clothesline bans in the U.S. where, over the past thirty years or so, homeowner associations or tenancy agreements have almost eradicated the once-iconic washing poles of communities such as those seen in New York in the 1981 documentary *Clotheslines*.

Anthony Byrne's account of his battles with an Executive Producer who feared 'loads of complaints' over his sensitive portrayals of Irish, traveller women hanging out washing, confirms that clotheslines, and those associated with them, continue to have the potential to stir up controversy in the film world. However, it is interesting to note how Richard Clark deliberately reversed the association of clotheslines and a strong feminine domesticity in a poor, Irish community in *Life on Mars* to emphasise the insensitivity of police blundering through washing hanging between the houses in an inner-city

neighbourhood (2009). Similarly, in *Billy Elliot*, the back lanes filled with drying laundry through which Billy's brother runs to escape arrest, again highlights the effects of heavy-handed authority determined to destroy the unity and dignity of working-class mining families.

The clothesline is repeatedly used in cinema to show women, whether they like it or not, wrapped up in the enduring themes of domesticity – anticipating love (*Fiddler on the Roof*), caring for children (*Saving Mr. Banks*), and waiting for loved ones to return home (*Malena*). Often spending most of their time doing unpaid domestic work, the women's lowly status links them inextricably with working class or cultural groups who are similarly denied fair access to education, work or recreational opportunities. As seen for example in *Angela's Ashes*, *Ray* and *The Damned United*, initially the clotheslines seem to offer uplifting displays of bright and cheerful clothes and sheets that flag up the idea of tight-knit communities determined to put on a good show of decency and dignity. However, a closer look usually reveals that the only positive thing to be seen is the laundry, as underneath and around it the mean streets are populated by downtrodden women, dirty, ragged children and precariously-employed men who all suffer the indignities of deprivation, dispossession and condemnation by those higher up in society who gain from their oppression.

Set in the 1960s, *Wondrous Oblivion* shows a more contemporary mix of gender, class, racism and cultural issues told from the perspective of the Wisemans, a hardworking Jewish family who live amongst a dominant group of white working class folk in a row of shabby terraced houses with small gardens, each with its own meagre washing line. Mrs. Wiseman (Ruth) feels under constant scrutiny by her neighbours, who peer around their clotheslines with disapproval and suspicion at her and her son's dealings with the newly-arrived Jamaican family. Ruth's isolation and loneliness is highlighted from the vantage point of her clothesline from where she nervously makes friends with her new male neighbour, and subsequently, peeping out from behind the washing, she takes the opportunity to blurt out an apology to him for making things awkward between them.

The idea of the clothesline as a place where it is possible to voice thoughts that are socially unacceptable is seen time and time again. For example, in *Everything is Illuminated* the elderly woman quietly declares that she has waited forever for someone to come and ask about her family and community who were killed in a Nazi massacre; in *Made In Dagenham* the woman visiting Rita during the strike first confesses that she is married to the factory boss and then blurts out details of her unhappy marriage; and in *The Magdalene Sisters* one of the girls confesses that the little boy waving to her from the gate is her son from whom she has been separated. In one of the rare instances of an academic writing about a clothesline, Lisa French observes that in the Spanish dance scene in *An Angel at My Table* 'The washing might seem strangely in the way but it is important as a signifier of female space' (2007, p. 150). The sequence, depicting the down-at-heel Frame sisters shyly exchanging information with an exotic new friend, also

led me to notice that, by extension, the safety of that female space often acts to empower girls and women to express themselves freely and confidently.

A survey of the washing line scenes I have collected from cinema shows that, in almost all instances, the women seen by the clothesline long to be elsewhere and so it is often from this place that they are able to express what they really desire. For example, in *The Commitments* the three backing singers rehearse their dance moves to the aptly-chosen song ‘Nowhere to Run’ amidst the shared washing lines of a run-down housing estate, hoping for the lucky break that will take them away from the deprivation, unemployment and drudgery that surrounds them; in *Bend It Like Beckham*, Jess, who should be preparing for an important football match, gives in to parental pressure to play the role of dutiful daughter in the run-up to her sister’s traditional Punjabi wedding. Her footballing ambitions, which are at odds with her family’s middle-class expectations and aspirations, come into play as she skilfully kicks a ball through a row of colourful salwar kameezes<sup>18</sup> that she has pinned on the clothesline; and in *Muriel’s Wedding*, standing by the burnt remains of the washing Muriel’s mum set fire to before she committed suicide, Bill, a blatant adulterer and a bullying husband and father, who has also lied and cheated his way out of poverty into government office, tries to manipulate his eldest daughter to stay and look after the younger children. He says, ‘Someone’s got to look after them. You owe me, Muriel.’ However, Muriel firmly informs him that she is leaving and that, on the contrary, it is his responsibility because ‘You owe *us*, dad.’

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<sup>18</sup> Women’s suits comprising of loose trousers and long tops.



## Clotheslines and danger

Mary Ann Doane's study of the paranoid woman's film and her observation of the alienated, isolated woman who watches from the window, fearing intrusion or aggression (1984), made me notice a link between similarly unsettling depictions of anxious women by their clotheslines. The clothesline structure itself operates as a physical divide that tends to place an unsophisticated, defenceless woman on the home side of the line in a situation where she is unable to prevent a stronger, worldly-wise assailant crossing the line towards her. For example, in *Unforgiven* all the working girls stand by the clotheslines fearfully watching the return of the cowboy who had previously carried out a vicious attack on Delilah; in *The Piano* Ada struggles for her life as the jealous, enraged Stuart drags her through the clothesline to the chopping block; and in *Slumdog Millionaire* the mum looks up from her work to see a band of thugs rush past the clotheslines towards her and her children. Doane also refers to Freud's theory of The Uncanny to explain the idea of the home as simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, comforting and threatening (1984), which also led me towards a better understanding of the many contradictions and ambiguities surrounding the line of washing, such as the way they are private yet public and evoke contrary notions of clean and pure vs. dirty and dangerous. As hinted at by the interviewee in *Clotheslines* who described how she always had to get the washing in before her husband came home, not everyone is happy to see their most intimate garments wafting on a line in the breeze. Conspicuous variations between male and female garments may also trigger fears of sexual difference, specifically evoking the fear of castration as explored in Freud's study of The Sandman tale (1958). A film scene may also show a clothesline of limply-hanging underwear and

bedsheets to suggest a sense of the vulnerability and defenceless of its owner, caught unawares, as someone strides past it who is fully clothed, for example in a formal suit or military uniform as in *And God Created Woman* and *Inglourious Basterds*. Since ancient times textiles have evoked a sense of mortality, from the Greek goddesses of fate who created, measured and cut the thread of human life; and during the Renaissance, when cloth and clothes often outlasted their owners, the memory and material identities of those that had passed away were kept alive as they were passed down and worn by other members of the family (Jones and Stallybrass 2001). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, to find modern ideas about clothes tainted with thoughts of death, danger and dread, as expressed for example, by Wilson who is unnerved by eerie thoughts of a snake's sloughed-off skin in a museum's costume collection (1985) or by Barthes who perceives mutilation and decapitation in headless, limbless, empty garments (1972). Thus, notions of aversion and fear associated with disembodied clothes and linens, so often displayed on the line of washing, helps to explain how they contribute so successfully to spine-chilling scenes of murder and mayhem. Furthermore, a line of pure, white clothes or sheets provides an unsurpassable canvas or surface on which to project great splashes and spatters of blood or filth to shock the viewer into reactions of disbelief, horror or disgust.

#### Art-inspired Clotheslines and Textiles

As someone who often notices images and tableaux vivants reminiscent of famous paintings and sculpture in film scenes, I identify closely with those knowledgeable audiences mentioned by Monaco who readily pick up on references to artistic culture, and welcome for purposes of further research and development the comments of critics and

commentators who are also keenly aware of the interface between film and fine art. For example, Hélène Keyssar's elegant evocation of the laundry lines in *Clotheslines* as 'painting in motion' (1995), her comparison of the laundry's forms to the work of great artists such as Vermeer, Cezanne, Hopper and Rothko (ibid.) and Goldstein's witty portrayal of the structures that support the lines as 'Giacometti-style interlopers' (2003) encourages me to consider Cantow's work and those artists respectively in a new light. Furthermore, I particularly appreciate the work of filmmakers whose training in fine-art practice gives them the expertise to talk about how they reference art, artists and artistic style to enhance the quality of the viewing experience for their audience, as well as for their own personal satisfaction, as seen for example in Webber's extensive, enthusiastic descriptions of the research carried out for *Girl* (2004). Cantow acknowledges the artistry of the women she filmed hanging out their washing who were well-aware that their work would be scrutinized as closely as any art exhibit for displaying satisfactory arrangements of colours, shapes and styles. I would also suggest that it is Champion's art school training and Webber's background in art history that gives them the ability to elevate their lines of washing to works of art, just as they each use art-inspired costumes and textiles to give the art enthusiast the opportunity to discern additional meaning and pleasure in the identification of those connections. For example, tableaux appear in Champion's depiction of Ada and Baines' enigmatic cloth-covered kiss, alluding to Magritte's mysterious painting 'The Lovers'; Webber evokes Hobbema's 'The Avenue at Middelharnis' as the setting for Griet and Peter's walk in the country; and Goldbacher's depiction of Rosina,

distraught at the end of her affair with Cavendish, with loosened hair, white chemise and red wrap, is posed and lit to invite comparison with Caravaggio's 'The Magdalen Weeping.' Also of great value here is Hollander's theory that explains the propensity of cinema audiences to have the same skill as their ancestors, whose experience of drapery in art and places of worship predisposed them to understand the revelatory purpose of textiles (1993). For example, it helps to explain how the washing line arrangement in *Beauty and the Beast* works as the interface of Belle's two worlds, so that by the simple action of passing under the sheets we imagine her transported from the farmyard to a more gracious setting. The idea of transporting characters from their everyday existence to a more hopeful, romantic scenario via the washing line is seen in *Strictly Ballroom* and *West Side Story*, and also in the more elaborate fantasy song and dance sequences in *Mama Mia!* and *Hairspray*. Furthermore, I would also add that one of the purposes of washing line sequences that use dramatic backlighting to cast silhouettes of the characters onto linens in strange, distorted shadows (as in *The Piano*, *Big Fish* and *Ray*), may be to introduce an element of horror into a narrative, as seen in *The Piano*'s Bluebeard play, but offers another, less costly way of portraying a world of make-believe.

Campion, Goldbacher and Webber each respond to Mulvey's call for feminist directors to find new ways of showing female eroticism and agency (1975) through the active, dynamic gaze of Ada, Rosina and Griet respectively. Additionally, each film uses the sensual nature of textiles and costume to explore issues surrounding feminine autonomy, desire and intimacy. In the past, film costume was frequently derided for being frivolous and distracting, based on misguided interpretations such as Freud's view of women as

clothes fetishists who have a childish desire to be looked at and admired. However, innovative studies such as Bruzzi's, that were entirely in response to the moment in *The Piano* when Baines fingers the hole in Ada's stocking (1993), reveals the essential connection that eroticism is evoked by imagining the sensual touch of fabrics in near proximity to the skin. Similar instances occur, for example, in *The Governess* when Rosina first makes love with Cavendish, she covers herself in a square of bridal-like white silk so that as Cavendish's white shirt sleeves brush against her body the two fabrics seem to blend into one; and similarly, in *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Griet's intimacy with Vermeer is shown through the erotically-charged moments when their sleeves accidentally brush together as they work at the pigment table, as they huddle under the cover of his coat to peer through the camera obscura, or as she presses herself into the folds of his shirt when he pierces her ear. It is thus possible to consider that the sensuous portrayal of fabric brushing up against fabric, or the caress of fabric against flesh offers the feminist director another aesthetic for showing non-voyeuristic moments of sexuality.

In my eyes *The Governess* is full of images that allude to many well-known paintings and photographs but unlike Campion and Webber, Goldbacher makes no direct reference to specific artists who may have inspired her work. However, in view of the added value art history information brings to an appreciation of *The Piano* and *Girl*, it would be of great interest to know whether Goldbacher intended to evoke such connections and, if so, to know which artists and photographers most inspired her. For myself and other art-appreciating researchers and filmmakers, a closer examination of the art, artists and

practices that inspire directors offers abundant potential to provide new ways of perceiving their vision and craft; and in turn this inspires me to incorporate art-inspired textiles in the layers of my practice.

### Practice

Interviews following the release of *The Piano*, *The Governess* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* each heavily reference movies and artworks that the filmmakers used to find the right look for their characters, costumes and sets. Thus, I am reminded that creative inspiration is of great interest to many cinema-goers, and in turn this prompts me to be sure of explaining the references I make in my own work to artists such as Viola and Tait. Furthermore, Webber's ebullient descriptions of the meticulous art research processes he undertook for *Girl*, and the subtle background details he searched out in films such as *Rebecca*, *The Earrings of Madame De*, *Witness* and *Beauty and The Beast*, provide a compelling and exemplary account of how a director can find the inspiration to make a film picture-perfect. Consequently, Webber's practice prompted my own research into the clotheslines in *Beauty and the Beast* that resulted in a recreation of Cocteau's rustic-style clothesline of crossed ash poles and sheets dampened to make them more transparent for shadow play. Additionally, the hands that grasp and twist the sheets in *Cut Up* allude to the sensual fabric arrangements in *The Governess*'s lovemaking scenes; and *Melancholy* pays homage to Campion's lines of wet washing in *The Piano* and *Bright Star* and to the influence of Bill Viola's reflections of desolation and self-reflection in *Observance*.

The films and working methods of Margaret Tait have been a constant inspiration to my own practice throughout this study. Although Tait's films do not pay overt attention to textiles, the northern climates of Orkney and Edinburgh make it necessary for almost all the people in her films to be wrapped up in layers of woollen clothing and there is one particularly touching detail of her mother's tweed coat in *The Portrait of Ga*, the colours of which perfectly match the landscape she inhabits. Collecting images and sounds over prolonged periods of time, as in *The Look of the Place* made between 1969 and 1981, Tait tracked the day-to-day activities of ordinary, working people going about their daily lives. Thus, her dogged, self-sufficient, self-funding practice of capturing the small, intimate, domestic poetics of the everyday encourages me to stay steadfast in my own attempts to investigate all that is common and uncommon in the line of washing and its textiles.

The regular occurrence of gender and class-based inequality mixed with dramas of intimidation and danger around cinema's clotheslines inspires me to continue to develop my practice along two lines: one that takes a bolder approach to allow my collection of textiles to be spoiled by dirt and blood, and the other that challenges some of the more fixed stereotypes of gendered or class-prejudiced behaviour around the laundry. For example, I am interested in creating work that focuses in microscopic detail on the woven, embroidered detail of precious cloths that are penetrated and stained by gory fluids, and in developing sequences that intensify sensations of unease and eeriness with

empty garments that also suffer harm. Additionally, I am curious to explore the effects of reparations, successful or otherwise, made to blemished, ripped or threadbare fabrics, and to relate these to narratives of recovery and reconciliation. Too many portrayals of the clothesline involve traditional gender and power inequalities, as seen in loving displays of feminine hope and care that are ruined by acts of male aggression, in romanticized displays of working-class poverty that show an unrealistic wealth of laundry on communal lines, and in narratives where men temporarily shrug off their machismo to play the romantic fool, lover or hero around the line of washing. Thus, it would be refreshing to find innovative ways of showing realistic representations of humble washing lines, of seeing women fending off attacks, and of female ardour, comedy and heroics on and around the clothesline.

In my lifetime, the clothesline has changed from being a practical, unselfconscious, common or garden sign of the everyday workings of family life into something that is more and more frequently discouraged, banned or derided by those who perceive it as an unwelcome reminder of poorer sections of society, or possibly as something that triggers subconscious Freudian fears. Cinema, however, is doing a fantastic job at flagging up the beauty and narrative potential of the clothesline. Directors are not shy of desecrating pure, white linens with blood and filth to confront the viewer with scenes of violence and abuse, usually meted out on an innocent victim. I want to brave enough to follow suit.



Cinema also shows many instances of women experiencing agency within the feminine space of the clothesline, although it is too often guilty of perpetuating the trope of poor, oppressed working class folk suffering and struggling along under their washing. This research encourages me to keep pushing at the boundaries of the washing line and its textiles to celebrate feminine empowerment and class and cultural pride, to keep finding new ways of portraying the ambiguities of life and death evoked by clothes, cloth and the clothesline, and hopefully to inspire other filmmakers to do the same.

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## Appendix

Transcript of voiceover that accompanies washing line compilation film *Reading*

### *Between the Lines*

I have always loved the sight of a full washing line blowing in the wind, associating it with happy childhood memories coupled with family life, and over time this has led me to notice how frequently clotheslines appear in cinema.

Clip: *Gellifor* (2008).

Often appearing for only a few seconds of screen time, the line of washing could easily be missed, but as with any movie prop, it is not there by accident but has been deliberately put in place to serve a particular purpose. This compilation of clips, from over eighty films, sets out to discover what those purposes are.

Clips: *Angela's Ashes* (dir. Alan Parker, 1999), *Suffragette* (dir. Sarah Gavron, 2015), *Calendar Girls* (dir. Nigel Cole, 2003), *My Neighbour Totoro* (dir. Hayao Miyazaki, 1988), *The Damned United* (dir. Tom Hooper, 2009), *Normal* (dir. Jane Anderson, 2003), *The Snowman* (dir. Dianne Jackson and Jimmy T. Murakami, 1982).

If you are expecting to see lots of heartwarming scenes taking place under beautiful lines of linens – they are here – but you may be surprised to find that they are just as likely to be the backdrop to violence, murder and mayhem.

Clips: *Ray* (dir. Taylor Hackford, 2004), *Mamma Mia!* (dir. Phyllida Lloyd, 2008), *Everything Is Illuminated* (dir. Liev Schreiber, 2005), *The Piano* (dir. Jane Campion,

1993), *Heaven's Gate* (dir. Michael Cimino, 1980), *Slumdog Millionaire* (dir. Danny Boyle, 2008).

Very often, lines of washing are used to give a rosy view of people who don't have much but are part of a close-knit community.

Clips: *Once Upon A Time In America* (dir. Sergio Leone, 1984), *The Commitments* (dir. Alan Parker, 1991), *My Left Foot* (dir. Jim Sheridan, 1989), *Oliver!* (dir. Carol Reed, 1968).

And of course, lines of washing are often used to offer an uplifting or nostalgic picture of family or domestic life.

Clips: *Private Peaceful* (dir. Pat O'Connor, 2012), *Goodnight Mr. Tom* (dir. Jack Gold 1998), *Man of Steel* (dir. Zack Snyder, 2013).

I couldn't make a film about washing lines in cinema without including some clips from Roberta Cantow's Emmy-award winning documentary called *Clotheslines* of 1981 in which she found women from all over New York City willing to talk about their experiences.

Clips : *Clotheslines* (dir. Roberta Cantow, 1981).

Back in narrative films, I have found a recurring, romantic image of lace curtains floating on the breeze that suggests the idea of a wedding veil, and of love and marriage.



Clips: *Nanny McPhee and The Big Bang* (dir. Susanna White, 2010), *Testament of Youth* (dir. James Kent, 2014), *Pride and Prejudice* (dir. Joe Wright, 2005).

Whilst it is noticeable that the washing line can define a space where women seem relatively content to be close to home, for many others the clothesline shows them to be isolated from society or the outside world. And so, standing by the clothesline, a character may often be observed longing to be somewhere else or hoping for a better life, as seen here in *Bend It Like Beckham*, Jess is under pressure to be at home helping her family which means missing out on football training.

Clips: *Big Fish* (dir. Tim Burton, 2003), *Meek's Cutoff* (dir. Kelly Reichardt, 2010), *Ida* (dir. Pawel Pawlikowski, 2013), *Shell* (dir. Scott Graham, 2012), *Bend It Like Beckham* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, 2002).

Continuing the theme of longing, musicals and dance films also make use of washing line arrangements to transport their characters from familiar surroundings to a place where their romantic yearnings or other imaginings can take flight.

Clips: *West Side Story* (dir. Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, 1961), *Strictly Ballroom* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 1992), *Fiddler on the Roof* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1971), *Hairspray* (dir. Adam Shankman, 2007).

Sometimes, amongst the intimacy of drying sheets and underwear, things of a sexual nature surface around the line of washing.

Clips: *And God Created Woman* (dir. Roger Vadim, 1956), *Rear Window* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954).

These scenes are frequently voyeuristic and vary in their level of intrusiveness, so it is interesting to come across the occasional example seen from a feminine perspective.

Clips: *Malena* (dir. Giuseppe Tornatore, 2000), *Once Upon a Time In America* (dir. Sergio Leone, 1984), *Fish Tank* (dir. Andrea Arnold, 2009).

Clotheslines seem to lend themselves to comedy situations with an element of slapstick or fooling around in the lines of washing bringing light relief to a story.

Clips: *Strictly Ballroom* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 1992), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (dir. Ken Hughes, 1968), *Blazing Saddles* (dir. Mel Brooks, 1974).

Running for nearly five-and-a-half minutes, *It's A Wonderful Life* is the longest scene I've found that takes place by a line of washing, and in *The Full Monty* you'll see one of only three men to be spotted hanging out laundry in this compilation.

Clip: *It's A Wonderful Life* (dir. Frank Capra, 1946), *The Fully Monty* (dir. Peter Cattaneo, 1997).

It is interesting to see the comedy washing line continued in animations, and it is particularly satisfying to see the complex designs and movement of laundry receiving such careful and detailed attention.

Clips: *Aladdin* (dir. Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992), *Flushed Away* (dir. David Bowers and Sam Fell, 2006), *Gnomeo and Juliet* (dir. Kelly Asbury, 2011), *Minions* (dirs. Kyle Balda and Pierre Coffin, 2015)

The clothesline can also be used to draw attention to a man's physical attractiveness in scenes that position him semi-clothed around the washing and showing him to be resourceful and capable.

Clips: *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*) (dir. Jean Cocteau, 1946), *Man of Steel* (dir. Zack Snyder, 2013), *Batman Forever* (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1995), *The English Patient* (dir. Anthony Minghella, 1996).

And in chase or pursuit sequences lines of washing add to the sense of a character's ability to overcome problems or obstacles.

Clips: *The Bourne Ultimatum* (dir. Paul Greengrass, 2007), *Billy Elliot* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000).

The car driving through the laundry in *Get Carter*, made in 1971, seems to have become a model for many subsequent car chases.

Clips: *Get Carter* (dir. Mike Hodges, 1971), *Thelma & Louise* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1991).

Perhaps it is to remind us of their concern for ordinary folk that it is not unusual to see superheroes testing their powers around the clothesline.

Clips: *Batman Begins* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2005), *Spider-Man* (dir. Sam Raimi, 2002), *Man of Steel* (dir. Zack Snyder, 2013).

But what is so clever about the clothesline is the way that it creates a physical divide which shows characters either side of it separated by different concerns or interests.

Clips: *Don't Look Now* (dir. Nicholas Roeg, 1973), *The Way, Way Back* (dir. Nat Faxon and Jim Rash, 2013).

In some narratives characters are able to reach out and understand each other over the laundry. For instance, here [*Made in Dagenham*], as the husband and wife are supportive of each other's new roles, and in *An Angel at My Table* sisters stop on their way home and make a new friend.

Clips: *Made in Dagenham* (dir. Nigel Cole, 2010), *An Angel At My Table* (dir. Jane Campion, 1990).

In *Wondrous Oblivion* when the neighbours speak to each other for the first time, it is worth noticing that the red and orange tea towels and peg bag at Dennis's eye line, like the flowers by Ruth, bring a brightness to the scene that hints towards the spark of a connection between the characters.

Clip: *Wondrous Oblivion* (dir. Paul Morrison, 2003).

After the shock of seeing his friend in a dress, Billy gets himself together and passes under the clothesline into the house.

Clip: *Billy Elliot* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000).

But, more often than not, the line of washing shows the place where irreconcilable differences meet, as seen here when Denny burns Rita's college books in a fit of jealous rage.

Clip: *Educating Rita* (dir. Lewis Gilbert, 1983).

Or in *Radio Days* we see two men who live next door to each other argue out their religious differences by the clothesline.

Clip: *Radio Days* (dir. Woody Allen, 1987).

Everyone knows the saying about airing one's dirty laundry in public so it should come as no surprise that the line of washing is often used as a site around which all sorts of people come clean about a variety of secrets and hidden truths. Here, as a young woman goes about her duties at a Magdalene laundry, she is secretly visited by members of her family.

Clip: *The Magdalene Sisters* (dir. Peter Mullan, 2002).

Then, family friend and company boss complains to Irma about her husband's mood swings at work. Also, note the three sizes of ladies underwear that indicate Roy's changing identity.

Clip: *Normal* (dir. Jane Anderson, 2003).

In *Made In Dagenham* at the height of the strike, the woman in white confesses that she is married to the other woman's boss and then continues to make a much deeper revelation.

Clip : *Made In Dagenham* (dir. Nigel Cole, 2010).

In *The Help*, Skeeter explains to Aibileen her plan to conduct some undercover investigations.

Clip: *The Help* (dir. Tate Taylor, 2011).

In *Muriel's Wedding*, Muriel tries to understand what happened to her mother the family she has left behind.

Clip: *Muriel's Wedding* (dir. P. J. Hogan, 1994)

In *Saving Mr. Banks*, the idyllic scene of a dad playing with his children amongst the washing takes a change of direction when the mum finds a half-drunk bottle of spirits in his jacket pocket.

Clip: *Saving Mr. Banks* (dir. John Lee Hancock, 2013).

And finally, the evil General Zod places himself by the line of washing to explain himself to Superman.

Clip: *Man of Steel* (dir. Zack Snyder, 2013).

Another important use of the clothesline is to show escalating tensions between characters as clean washing is ripped down or spoiled. In *Girl with a Pearl Earring* a disgruntled child takes things out on the maid, and here, the mother in *Ray* makes her views clear to her employer.

Clips: *The Piano* (dir. Jane Campion, 1993), *Girl with A Pearl Earring* (dir. Peter Webber, 2003), *Ray* (dir. Taylor Hackford, 2004).

Another aspect of the line of washing is utilized through the effects of bad weather which shows laundry drenched, frozen or caught in terrible gusts of wind to make an audience pick up on feelings of fear, foreboding or loneliness.

Clips: *It* (dir. Tommy Lee Wallace, 1990), *Girl with A Pearl Earring* (dir. Peter Webber, 2003), *Bright Star* (dir. Jane Campion, 2009), *The Conjuring* (dir. James Wan, 2013).

Characters who look safe and well within the line of washing may often be seen to be vulnerable as others attempt to disturb their privacy or security.

Clips: *Halloween* (dir. John Carpenter, 1978), *The Chorus* (dir. Christophe Barratier, 2004), *It's A Wonderful Afterlife* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, 2013).

Here, the white sheet that is drawn aside to reveal the approaching Nazi convoy juxtaposes innocence and purity with an awful sense of impending danger.

Clip: *Inglourious Basterds* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2009).

What I have come to realize is that the clothesline is very often in position to bear witness to the ultimate human transgression – of crossing the line with murder in mind.

Clips: *On the Waterfront* (dir. Elia Kazan, 1954), *Ashes and Diamonds* (dir. Andrzej Wajda, 1958), *Pat Garrett and Billy The Kid* (dir. Sam Peckinpah, 1973).

The full effect of such violence never fails to shock as spilt blood is seen seeping into clean, white linens.

Clips: *Cold Mountain* (dir. Anthony Minghella, 2003), *Billy Elliot* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000), *Heaven's Gate* (dir. Michael Cimino, 1980).

Coming in all shapes and sizes, washing lines in the movies are often stunning and sometimes magnificent but when necessary they can also appear meagre and miserable. Clips: *Saving Mr. Banks* (dir. John Lee Hancock, 2013), *Bright Star* (dir. Jane Campion, 2009), *Everything Is Illuminated* (dir. Liev Shreiber, 2005), *The Commitments* (dir. Alan Parker, 1991), *Bright Star* (dir. Jane Campion, 2009).

[Washing lines] are useful for opening a scene or for introducing a new idea – and see here the child playing with her dolls' clothes on a miniature washing line.

Clips: *Beauty and the Beast* (dir. Jean Cocteau, 1946), *Saving Mr. Banks* (dir. John Lee Hancock 2013), *Bright Star* (dir. Jane Campion, 2009), *Everything Is Illuminated* (dir. Liev Shreiber, 2005), *The Commitments* (dir. Alan Parker, 1991), *Bright Star* (dir. Jane Campion, 2009).

Also used to close a sequence, washing lines offer layer upon layer of information – sometimes subtle and sometimes more obvious.

Clips: *Beauty and the Beast* (dir. Jean Cocteau, 1946), *Lawrence of Arabia* (dir. David Lean, 1962), *Great Expectations* (dir. David Lean, 1946).

Most people will understand that depicting a line of washing in an animation sequence requires a huge amount of time, skill and determination.

Clips: *Shaun the Sheep – Washday* (dirs. Jean-Philippe Vine and Richard Starzak, 2007), *The Simpsons Season 9 Episode 1: The City of New York vs. Homer Simpson* (dir. Jim Reardon, 1997).



Also, some washing lines refer to those in other movies. For example, Peter Webber, director of *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, says that the inspiration for his lines came from Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*. And did you notice the similarity between the washing in *West Side Story* and *Minions*? And the dark high rise blocks strung with clotheslines in *Batman Begins* resonate with the sense of the dirty dealings seen in *On The Waterfront*. Clips: *Girl With A Pearl Earring* (dir. Peter Webber, 2003), *Beauty and the Beast* (dir. Jean Cocteau, 1946), *West Side Story* (dir. Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, 1961), *Minions* (dirs. Kyle Balda and Pierre Coffin, 2015), *Batman Begins* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2005), *On the Waterfront* (dir. Elia Kazan, 1954).