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Representation of Femininity in Jane Campion's Works

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Introduction

The main topic of the thesis is the representation of femininity in Jane Campion's works, highlighting one of her most successful films, *The Piano*, and one of her earliest works, a short film titled *Passionless Moments*. Oppression, female sexuality and agency are recurring elements in her films.

Although only *The Piano* and *Passionless Moments* will be discussed in detail, almost her entire filmography and career could be mentioned, because strong, independent, and eccentric women are often the protagonists in her films. The way in which Campion portrays female characters is unique, brave, and also a subject of debate and controversy. As one of the most prominent figures whose films revolve around gender, sexual politics, emancipation, and feminism, her works are highly praised by critics, and viewers alike, and even scholars have found them intriguing. One of these scholars is Kathleen A. McHugh, a professor currently working at the University of California. She has written about Campion's works, including *The Piano*. Her professional interest is mostly in feminist studies, which is why she took great interest in Campion's filmography. McHugh's work, titled "*Sounds that Creep Inside You*": *Female Narration and Voiceover in the Films of Jane Campion* (2001) will be referenced in the thesis --among many other works by different scholars--, because her research about Campion's approach to female narration is very insightful. One reason for the controversy surrounding Campion's works is that the characters, especially the protagonists, are portrayed in a perplexing manner. As a result, it is often challenging to understand her stories, or the intentions of the characters clearly. Campion also uses themes that female viewers can relate to. For instance, inequality between genders, abuse, and so on. Despite the fact that her protagonists are troubled and oppressed by men, the director does not show them as victims, but rather empowers them (McHugh 194).

Although *The Piano* became widely popular and undeniably successful – both financially and critically – when it was released in 1993, it also became polarizing and controversial. Since Campion always directs and writes films about strong-willed and emotionally independent women, they are bound to gain criticism to some extent, because the films themselves push against the already established boundaries of filmmaking.

One of the reasons it was considered outstanding is because the film puts emphasis on female sensibility and sexuality. However, this is the same reason why it was also controversial, because the film portrays sexual abuse in an unconventional way, since in

the end the protagonist, Ada, chooses to be with the man who previously wronged her. Therefore, Campion's portrayal of the feminist perspective attracted criticism, but she still has the will to make her films in this way, thus making her filmography worthy of analyzing and discussing (McHugh 193).

Wendy Brown (48) pondered the following about Campion's films and the issues they portray, although focusing more on feminist politics:

The question is whether feminist politics can prosper without a moral apparatus, whether feminist theorists and activists will give up Truth and Morality for politics. Are we willing to engage in struggle rather than recrimination, to develop our faculties rather than avenge our subordination with moral and epistemological gestures, to fight for a world rather than conduct process on the existing one? (48)

With this question, Brown talks about a concept Nietzsche has worked with: resentment. Resentment basically means the "morality that emerges from the powerless to avenge their incapacity for action: it enacts their resentment of strengths that they cannot match or overthrow" (Brown 44).

In a political sense, the quote on page 48 of Brown's work is addressing the tension between feminist politics and moral limitations, asking whether feminist politics can exist without moral expectations. The author questions whether feminist theorists and activists are willing to prioritize political action over moral or epistemological gestures, and whether they are willing to engage in struggle rather than recrimination. The quote suggests that the pursuit of truth and morality may not always align with political goals and that feminists may need to prioritize political action to create real change. This may involve developing their faculties and fighting for a better world, rather than simply avenging their subordination with moral or epistemological gestures. For example, when an offensive statement is made about feminists or women in general, feminists' response should not be recrimination, but instead, they should aim and try to find the source of the problem, because of which the negative statement was made in the first place. Therefore, the quote challenges feminists to consider the role of morality in their activism and whether it is necessary in order to achieve their goals. To summarize, the quote puts emphasis on the importance of taking action and fighting so that change could happen in the world, rather than simply critiquing the already established system.

On the other hand, this quote and sentiment can be applied to Campion's works as well, because the characters she creates do not limit themselves to a certain kind of morality and judgment, they are more flexible, and morally gray. Her films and characters are more complex than to fall under the category of morality or truth, therefore their struggling is far more impactful and closer to reality. This is why although violence and abuse often are a topic in her films, she does not portray her characters as victims. She portrays them in a quite different way: using the characters' inner thoughts and feelings, how they realistically react to their truths and hard lives. Therefore, the technique of female narration is used. Also, for the very same reason, this narration is not entirely reliable: the thoughts and emotions of the characters do not necessarily meet reality (McHugh 193-94). This is why Campion's use of female narration is unconventional: this way, she is able to explore femininity in a more mature way, and can also make the respective characters more relatable, with creating a certain intimacy between them and the viewers. The director also uses her characters to reflect some of her own voices, thoughts, and emotions, making them even more personal, and intimate. Also, as mentioned before, Campion does not portray her characters as victims, simply because she intends to convey a deeper meaning. She does not want the viewers to feel pity for them, but instead wants to convey a complex and realistic example of oppression between people who are not equal to each other. It approaches the women of the story very differently than in the usual portrayal of women in films. This is why Campion's films are very unique: they provide a different approach to the portrayal of female characters.

Methodology: Research on intimate partner violence, female agency

Narrative techniques have a significant role in Campion's films, which is why female narration is a key topic of the thesis. However, other than narration, it is important to discuss intimate partner violence and agency. Based on empirical research, Carisa R. Showden has written a book about agency in domestic violence and in troubled partnerships, titled *Choices Women Make: Agency in Domestic Violence, Assisted Reproduction, and Sex Work* (2011).

Agency is often associated with autonomy, however, despite they are very similar in nature, they are two different concepts. On the one hand, autonomy means self-government, self-control, the ability of a person to express their own will and desire, while being independent. On the other hand, agency is theoretically more broadened, because the person's social place, and political sense comes into effect when making decisions. In the words of Showden, "agency encompasses both doing and being, suturing together critical aspects of both freedom and autonomy that we might miss if we looked at either alone" (Showden 1-2). Female agency in itself could be considered a resisting force, because it is often displayed as opposition to oppression.

Showden argues that although the world drastically changed since the colonial period – during which *The Piano* takes place—some expectations and social, gender norms have not changed that much. For example, the husbands' role was to oversee their wives, to make sure they do not commit adultery and stay loyal both to them and the family. Meanwhile, the wives' role was to take care of the children and raise them, to give them a proper, peaceful home, and to mitigate their husband's impulsive behaviours. These norms can be seen quite often even in our time. This is, of course, problematic, because these norms and gender roles further support the dominance of men, and the subordination of women (Showden 44). In colonial and older times, marriage was often just a trade, not necessarily mutually beneficial. Women rarely had any say in their marriage, they were "given" away by their parents to a suitable man. However, it was the tradition. By marriage, women seemingly had the protection of a man, and, in exchange, it was their responsibility to satisfy their husband's sexual needs, take care of the house, give birth and raise the children. Also, some women in certain professions were literally, financially dependent on men, because they received so little payment that relying on a man was simply inevitable, so gender inequality was present even in work (Showden 44-45). Research shows that this inequality, men's dominance over women is a factor in domestic

violence. According to Sherry Hamby, domestic violence is not as present between couples whose individual roles are more balanced.

In her book, *The Importance of Community in a Feminist Analysis of Domestic Violence among Native Americans*, Hamby writes the following:

Societies that lacked family violence were generally characterized by shared decision making, wives' control of some family resources, equally easy divorce access for husbands and wives, no premarital sex double standard, monogamous marriage, marital co-habitation, peaceful conflict resolution within and outside the home, and immediate social responses to domestic violence (180).

The goal of the thesis is to prove that these ideas, especially female agency can be applied to Jane Campion's *The Piano*. It is my argument that it can be analysed within this theoretical framework. In the next chapters, the film's portrayal of female narration, passion, and deconstruction of the male gaze will be analysed in detail in order to showcase that agency plays an important role in Campion's stories.

Chapter 1: The significance of passion in Jane Campion's works

To gain a better understanding of Campion's films and why are they important from the feminist perspective, it is essential to approach them from another perspective. In this chapter, I will mostly use Hilary Neroni's essay, titled *Following the Impossible Road to Female Passion: Psychoanalysis, the Mundane, and the Films of Jane Campion* (2012). According to Neroni, in every single film that Campion has directed and written, the main character is always a woman who is very passionate about something. In *The Piano*, Ada is passionate about music, therefore great emphasis is put on the relationship with her piano. To mention another example, it is worth to examine her film titled *In the Cut*. The protagonist, named Frannie Avery, is both a writer and a teacher, so she very much likes to play with words and to be creative with them. As a result, in a scene in the film, she is asked by another character if her interest in words is rather a hobby or a job, and she simply replies with a short sentence: "a passion". So, perhaps *In the Cut* is the best example to support this argument, because in the film, it is literally mentioned that the lead character is passionate, and that is what is most important to her, that is one of the most important aspects of her entire character. In most films, when a character is passionate about something, usually their goal is to gain fame and success because of it, or to break out of their monotonous, repetitive everyday lives. However, in Campion's films, this is not the case. Campion's characters are genuinely passionate about their respective activities, it is not in their intention to be famous for them, nor to break out of their everyday lives. In fact, their passion is often a manifestation of the mundane, they embrace their passion if it becomes repetitive. In Frannie Avery's case, this is precisely what happened, because since she is a writer and teacher, words became the most mundane things of all: her job, but she still loves them, nothing has changed whatsoever. This passion is the most important trait of Campion's characters, because, as mentioned above, it is part of what differentiates them from female characters of other movies. It can be seen that her characters' passion is mostly toward things that can be used to create: most prominently music, and literature. It is not only to give their lives a more important meaning, but rather to add to the mundane. It is used so that they are able to express themselves more efficiently in their day-to-day lives. Therefore, passion is basically a representation of the character's own psychology, their own selves. Neroni states that "as Campion depicts it, passion is a formal expression of the psyche, not just what one thinks but also how one thinks" (Neroni 290-91). Psychanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan – whose work made an impact on many sciences, including feminist theory – had worked out

a conceptual understanding for human drive that can be applied to Campion's films as well. According to Lacan, drive is basically a point at which both our psyche and our bodies meet, therefore it is a representation of our psychological structure. There are two types of drives: drive and partial drive. For example, when a person desires something, he or she is unusually not satisfied until they gain the object or person that they desire, therefore it is simply a drive. Partial drive, however is the exact opposite: there is no endgame, partaking in the activity (a passion) is enough to satisfy the drive, since it is usually a recreational hobby (Lacan 177-79). In Lacan's book, titled *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, it is written that "if the drive may be satisfied without attaining what, from the point of view of a biological totalization of function, would be the satisfaction of its end of reproduction, it is because it is a partial drive, and its aim is simply this return into circuit" (Lacan 179). *The Piano* is the perfect example to support this, since Ada's passion for music does not end in anything. There is no concert at the end, there is no tangible success, it is a partial drive that adds so much to her character, because the piano helps to find her own place in the world, and also gives her happiness and a sense of fulfillment.

In Campion's films, passion is also used as a form of light criticism, because the way in which she portrays it, is in contrast to most films. For example, in traditional Hollywood films in which there is a masculine narrative, a "male gaze", female passion is not portrayed, almost anything is portrayed through the lens of the male. For example, Campion presents passion as an experience that both disrupts and yet is a part of the daily flow, which is one strategy she uses to portray passion. She portrays this experience in the film's format on both an artistic and narrative level. Campion formally displays the heroine's passion as a disruption in the objective structure of the movie, one that finally takes over that structure altogether, rather than presenting passion as an actual element within the story. This way, the audience is encouraged to look at the heroine's passion as subjective. The viewer not only sees but also experiences the subjectivity of the passion as the distortion through which he or she watches the film. On the level of form, Campion's movies consistently highlight the importance of female passion, resulting in the effect of subjectifying the form itself. According to Stella Bruzzi, this can be observed even in the seemingly small details of the films. For instance, in *The Piano*, even the clothing of the characters displays this subjectivity of their passion. She writes that "the complex reworkings of gender stereotypes in *The Piano* are located within costume, the film

ultimately advances a feminist discourse of clothes that neither absents the body nor simply reinforces traditional interpretations of the feminine” (Bruzzi 259). Although this quote is not exactly about the importance and role of female passion, Bruzzi provides a perfect example with which one can see how Campion portrays her characters in a non-traditional way, even in the smallest details. Also, the way in which Campion portrays passion differs from other interpretations because, though it may relieve the characters from their social obligations, it is also present in their everyday lives, not just in those rare occasions when they have a chance to escape it. In most movies with a traditional narrative, female characters only have passions that are for others, like their husbands or their children. They rarely have any individual passions which are only important and useful to them. Also, male antagonists generally have passions that are rather desires than drives, mostly resulting in romantic relationships, success or greatness. Some examples to this are Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* (1942), or Milos Forman’s *Amadeus* (1984). Both movies have male protagonists, and although they are two completely different types of characters, their passion is a desire. *Casablanca*’s goal is to be with the woman he loves, and Mozart’s goal in *Amadeus* is to win the rivalry between himself and Antonio Salieri in order to decide who is the superior musician. Compared to these two male characters, Campion’s protagonists are anti-progressive, since they do not have a goal in sight, their passion is just a drive that helps them get through the mundane, like Ada’s passion for playing the piano. In other words, in Campion’s movies, life is not about the extraordinary or incredible events that sometimes may happen to an individual, but rather about the dull, mundane reality of the character’s actual everyday life. However, for this exact reason, the mundane, ordinary things have potential to become extraordinary, simply because they teach the character to appreciate the small joys of life, therefore granting them the ability to “overcome” the mundane, it can become extraordinary as well. In Neroni’s words, Campion’s films “encourage us not to try to escape the everyday in order to find sublimity but instead to immerse ourselves within it” (Neroni 292-94).

1.1 Portrayal of passion in *Passionless Moments*

One of Campion's early works is a short film titled *Passionless Moments*. It was one of the most important films of her career, since it influenced her later portrayals of passionate characters. *Passionless Moments* is a short film directed by Jane Campion, with Gerald Lee contributing as writer, and it was initially released in 1983. The film contains ten scenes of different characters partaking in everyday activities such as washing dishes, driving a car, and grocery shopping. Despite the simple nature of the story, each scene is accompanied by an inner monologue that highlights the characters' deep, individual philosophical thoughts. Combining dreamlike imagery, fantasy sequences, and surreal elements, the film visually plays with the thoughts of its characters and contrasts the mundane moments of their everyday lives. The film's title refers to the idea that these moments in life are seemingly free from passions and emotions. However, the film also suggests that even the dullest moments of life can be filled with passion and meaning through visual depictions of the thoughts of the characters. The short film is presented without an overarching plot, allowing the audience to make unique connections between the characters and their experiences. However, there are some themes that often return throughout the short, fourteen minute film: the search for meaning and purpose, the struggle for self-expression, and the tension between fitting in society and somehow still be unique individuals. *Passionless Moments* foreshadows many of the themes and techniques that would later appear in Campion's works. The film's use of surreal imagery, inner monologues, and unconventional narrative structures later became prominent in Campion's style of filmmaking (Neroni 295). To give an example: as mentioned before, there are ten different characters, each of them are performing mundane, everyday tasks. As a reaction of their respective tasks, their minds enter a state of deep philosophical awareness. In the film, their thoughts are portrayed visually, and this visual portrayal is the only way that the "dullness" of the scenes is interrupted. In one particular scene, there is a woman collecting flowers and then is seen putting them in vases. Then, suddenly, a noise can be heard, and the woman believes that she might have heard a woodpecker bird. However, she is soon proven wrong, because when she looks out her window, she sees her neighbour hitting her laundry with what seems to be a stick, or twig. Now, with a visual scene attached to the sound, the character, and the viewers themselves, are connecting the previously heard sound to an actual event in the character's life. This scene portrays how strong one's imagination can be, because until the woman did not see what is actually producing the noise, her imagination projected a scene through which her mind justified hearing the

sound. After the woman returns to her flowers, a woodpecker animation is seen in the film, therefore she hears the bird's noises again. However, she soon realizes that there are no woodpeckers in Australia – where she lives – and the woodpecker sound is again stopped, since it should not even be in her imagination, because it is an impossible circumstance in her country. Again, the woman returns to collecting her flowers. With this scene, Campion highlights the significance of subjectivity. Despite the fact that in the scene, the woman's subjective hearing contrasts the objectivity of her surroundings, since there are no woodpecker birds in Australia at all, she could still hear it simply because of her subjective imagination. Similarly to this scene, in every other scene of the film, there is some misinterpretation of a sound or word, and that misinterpretation triggers the character's imagination (Neroni 295). Dana Polan, an American professor, wrote a book about Jane Campion and her films, simply titled *Jane Campion*. In it, he writes that "the mini-stories make manifest the efforts of imagination to transcend one's immediate situation and transport oneself elsewhere" (Polan 66). This quote is very fitting to describe *Passionless Moments*, because every character is projecting something with the help of their imagination, and that imagined scenery is helping them escape their mundane reality, making their everyday obligations and tasks easier to deal with.

According to Hilary Neroni, *Passionless Moments* is a significant piece of Campion's career, because she depicts completely mundane experiences, which are in fact not often depicted in any media, especially not in mainstream media. This shows that even early in her career, Campion was a unique director whose approach to filmmaking was unconventional and thought-provoking. In her depiction of the power of imagination, one can see how Campion really feels about the mundane. Special moments and the drive for passion originate between the subjective imagination and the objective circumstances of life: how people use their imagination to make dull experiences more enjoyable. In Neroni's words, this makes Campion a "phenomenological" filmmaker, which means that in her films, the objective events are not as important as the subjective experiencing of those events by the characters themselves (Neroni 296).

Hilary Neroni's journal article actually touches upon two different approaches in Campion's films, more specifically *The Piano*, and those two aspects are also parts of this thesis. One is the portrayal of passion, the other is narration, or, in this case, female narration. Since Neroni's analysis of the depiction of passion, which is the basis of this

chapter, also has some analysis of female narration in it, that part will be used and referenced in upcoming chapters of the thesis in which narration will be the main topic.

1.2 Portrayal of passion in *The Piano*

The Piano is a film about passion. The protagonist, Ada, has a very deep connection to her piano, and that connection, that passion, is the core idea of the entire film. Although being a piano player is a quite acceptable passion and hobby, Campion created circumstances in her film because of which it is not as tolerable. She was given away by her father to marry a man who is a complete stranger to her, has a daughter from her previous marriage, and she also has to travel far, because she lives in Scotland, and the man she is to marry lives in New Zealand. Despite these unpleasant and seemingly harsh circumstances, she still insists that her piano is also brought with them on the ship. In this situation, Ada insisting on the piano seems less acceptable, because she is willing to make an already harsh situation even worse. Also, because she is willing to undergo this marriage which she did not want, it is obvious that she wants to do anything to make sure her child is safe and well cared for, although insisting on the piano in those circumstances makes her seem less responsible. But, that is an essential part of her character, and also the film: she is willing to make sacrifices in order to continue honing her passion. To gain a better understanding of the seriousness of this passion, Ada's behaviour makes it very clear how devoted she is. She is seen touching the piano, even sensually fondling it. Also, she can be seen practicing even when the piano is not present. It is almost like her whole world depends on whether she can play the piano or not. Another important aspect of Ada's character, and perhaps the most important one, is that she is mute, she does not speak at all, only through her thoughts, because she is also a narrator in the story. In the film, she said: "I have not spoken since I was six years old. Lord knows why, not even me." Therefore, the piano becomes even more significant, because it is her method of expressing her personality, her thoughts and emotions (Neroni 298-99). Ada is emotionally stranded, married to a stranger in a foreign land. Campion uses cinematography to highlight Ada's distress, because there are many elements in the visuals that serve as metaphors for her situation. For example, when she arrives on a beach in New Zealand, her piano is left there, because according to Alisdair – her new husband – there is no more place for it, it has to be left there, and it is. Ada goes with her new husband to her new home, now without her favoured piano. Around Alisdair's house, there is an extensive forest, which seems hard and almost impossible to travel, so she is, quite literally, stranded there. In the house, there

are many objects scattered everywhere, and it is hard to focus on anything, since the sight is very overwhelming. Ada has to find her footing within all this, she visibly seems lost and disoriented. With this imagery and scenery, Campion creates a certain uneasy feeling in the viewer. Ada is closed in without the possibility to pursue her passion, and this hopelessness that she experiences can be felt when watching the film. This representation is also symbolic, because it is both true for Ada and her piano. Her piano is also stranded and literally closed in its box on the beach where it was left earlier in the film. This further strengthens and deepens Ada's passion, because it seems like she needs the piano, but the piano needs her as well (Neroni 300). Ada does not have any pleasures in her new life, besides the piano, and her daughter. But, later in the film, she falls in love with her husband's neighbour, George, and that love counts as a newly found passion for her. When she finds her piano again later in the film, she is overflowed with happiness, and the scenery also reflects that, because her daughter is also present in the scene, dancing around to her mother's music, filled with joy. Also, when Ada is playing the piano, Campion uses a different kind of imagery. For most parts in the film, she focuses on the surroundings, as mentioned previously. However, when Ada is enjoying her passion, playing the piano, the camera focuses on Ada herself: on her fingers as she plays, she closes her eyes to fully give herself to the pleasure of playing music, and there is a smile that is constantly on her face (Neroni 300). Therefore, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the focus is not on the objective event, but on the experience itself. If the focus was not on Ada's expressions while she plays, but rather on the performance by itself, the scene would not be as effective. This way, Campion is able to portray the character's passion in a much more intimate, profound way, because the viewers themselves can feel the relief and joy that Ada experiences when she reunites with her instrument. Returning to an already mentioned point, later in the film, Ada becomes involved with her husband, Alisdair's neighbour, George Baines. George became a great friend to the inhabitant people of the land, the Māoris. He even practices some of their traditions, including having face tattoos. George almost immediately falls in love with Ada during their first meeting, however, Ada's love takes some time to develop. The affair between them is a crucial factor in the relationship with her husband, because Alisdair obviously does not like their fondness for each other. Although Ada's interest in George could be attributed to the fact that George is keen on learning how to play the piano, to the point that he is even willing to give Alisdair a piece of land in exchange for the piano and Ada's lessons. So, they have a mutual interest, because of which they become entangled with each other. Their relationship is a new

passion for Ada, because she obviously enjoys being intimate with George. In a way, she approaches George in the same way that she approaches her piano, because she uses the same delicate hand movements when exploring George's body (Neroni 300-301).

Author Sue Gillett provides an interesting idea about George's love toward Ada. Ada and George had an arrangement between the two of them, because Ada agreed that she would give lessons to him in exchange for piano keys. In her book titled *Lips and Fingers: Jane Campion's The Piano*, Gillett states that George has given up on the arrangement between him and Ada, because "Baines comes to the realization that his desire, crucially, has the passive aim 'normally' allotted to woman. His desire is for her desire. Baines calls the bargain to end, realizing that he cannot buy, and Ada cannot sell, the personal connection, the experience of love, which he desires" (Gillett 282). In this quote, Gillett says that although George initially intended his relationship with Ada to be superficial and physical, he later realizes that he wants a deeper, emotional connection with her. He also wishes that his desire is reciprocated by Ada, because that way the emotional connection would be even deeper and more satisfying. Therefore, he ends the arrangement which initial nature was economical, in order to pursue a relationship that is based on genuine affection rather than exploitation.

Later in the film, Alisdair punishes Ada for her affair with George, and also for her unstoppable drive toward her passion, playing the piano. He violently cuts off one of her fingers so that she will not be able to play again. However, not even this can stop her. In one of the final scenes of the movie, it can be seen that Ada moved far away from Alisdair with the company of George. In her new circumstances, she seems happy, or at the very least much happier than in her previous home, with Alisdair. George made a prosthetic, metal finger to support her lost finger, so she is able to play the piano again perfectly. However, when she plays, an additional sound can be heard on the piano after she taps a key. Her prosthetic finger is making that sound. About this scene, film theorist Richard Allen said that "when she plays the piano at the end she plays it with a silver finger that clicks every time it hits the key, as a reminder of imperfection and loss—a kind of baffle or stain in the field of sound" (Allen 62). In other words, perhaps that additional sound that is made by Ada's finger involuntarily deepens her passion even further, because it reminds her of the fact that she lost a part of her body for the two of her passions: her newly found lover, George, and the piano. It is a bittersweet sound for her. In the film, the very last time the piano can be seen is in an imagination in Ada's mind. When they left New Zealand,

George has thrown the piano overboard the ship, and Ada was entangled in the rope that was attached to the piano, so she almost drowned. In her new life, she often imagines what would have happened if she did not manage to untangle herself from the rope. When she pictures the piano at the bottom of the sea, she usually pictures herself as well, with her dead body still attached to the rope. However, her ending is genuinely happy, since she successfully ran away with the man she loves, her daughter is safe and happy, and she received a prosthetic finger, because of which she is again able to practice her passion, and also give lessons to George. Still, she keeps that image of herself being dead at the bottom of the sea with her piano. In the movie, she said that "at night I think of my piano in its ocean grave, and sometimes of myself floating above it. Down there everything is so still and silent that it lulls me to sleep. It is a weird lullaby and so it is; it is mine". This means that although it is a horrible fate, she finds peace and comfort in the thought of her own death. Death's inevitability does not scare her, but rather makes her comfortable. In the end, she also starts to learn to speak again. Neroni states that "what this image emphasizes is that the drive in all its repetition is not motivated by plenitude, but driven by loss" (Neroni 303).

To conclude, in this chapter the importance of passion in Campion's films was analysed. After analyzing one of her earliest works, *Passionless Moments*, one can see how her portrayal of passion started. The connection between *Passionless Moments* and *The Piano* is that the depiction of the characters's passion is quite similar, since their passion is not some extraordinary, special event or object, but instead rather unremarkable, common things. In *Passionless Moments*, the subject of the woman's passion was the imaginary woodpecker, that could not even be there, since there are none of them in Australia. Imagining the woodpecker in an everyday, mundane circumstance, made the woman feel more passionate and curious, even if only for a few minutes. In *The Piano*, it is obviously the piano itself that is the object of Ada's passion. However, as mentioned several times throughout the chapter, it is not much about the object or subject itself, but rather about the experience. The objective event or happening is not as important as the specific character's subjective experiencing of said event. This sentiment can be obviously applied to Ada's character as well. In *The Piano*, even the cinematography is noticeably different when she is playing the piano, because throughout the majority of the film, Campion emphasizes the landscape and the space itself. However, when Ada is playing, the emphasis is on her, on her fingers, on her expressions, her way of experiencing the event. Another important

aspect of Campion's films is the use of narration. Although it was mentioned in this chapter, it was not thoroughly examined. The next chapter will be specifically about narration, or rather female narration in Campion's works, yet again using a few of her works as an example, although highlighting *The Piano* yet again.

Chapter 2: The importance of female narration in Campion's works

To gain a better understanding of narration, or female narration for that matter, it is important to examine narration in general. In order to do that, some information about the general history of narration will be discussed in this chapter before examining narration in *The Piano*.

2.1 Brief history of narration in cinema

Narration is the way a movie chooses to articulate its story. Usually, every single element of a film, including the directing, writing, and even cinematography is an addition to narration, making it more effective and easier to convey. Naturally, narration can also be the thoughts and reactions of a character, usually the antagonist. How he or she reacts to the events of the film is the most often used way of narration. However, according to Kathleen A. McHugh, thirty years of studying feminist narrative has proven that narration in films is dominantly male (McHugh 194). This is why many filmmakers have tried to focus on female characters, using explicitly female narration. (Silverman 141-86).

Sarah Kozloff stated the following on narration:

Voiceover narration in film and television has a long and rich history that began in the thirties, permeated Hollywood in the forties, shaped the address of television in the fifties, and counted among the favored techniques of the mostly male directors of the French New Wave in the sixties and seventies and of the New Hollywood Cinema up to the late eighties (Kozloff 33-9).

The quote provides essential information about the history and evolution of voiceover narration in film and television. The statement highlights that voiceover narration has been a part of the film industry since the 1930s, and it has had a significant and lasting impact on Hollywood and on the industry itself. The quote also states that voiceover narration has been particularly used by male directors during the various periods in cinematic history, including the French New Wave and New Hollywood Cinema. However, according to McHugh, there are significantly more female directors and

characters in modern cinema. Narration is also more frequently used from a female character's point of view, because "the voice we hear, and, more importantly the sensibility expressed, is, as often as not, a woman's" (195). Kozloff's quote also states that the narration technique has played an essential role in shaping the visual language and storytelling of these periods.

When discussing female directors and the history of narration, it is important to mention what was probably the very first film with a narrative style. Supposedly, the first film in the history of cinema that had a narrative technique and was also directed by a woman, was *Meshes of the Afternoon*, released in 1943 (Geller 140). Directed by Maya Deren (and co-directed by her husband, Alexander Hammid), although it is not a feature length film, because it is a short film with a runtime of fourteen minutes, it left a significant impact on the industry.

Theresa L. Geller (140) wrote the following about Maya Deren's work and influence:

Deren is credited with making the first narrative film in the history of the American avant-garde, which up to that point had been dominated by abstract representations and formal experiments with animation. *Meshes* utilizes characters, setting, and a narrative temporality owing as much to film noir and to Hollywood's "women's films" as to avant-garde experimentation.

With this quote, Geller emphasises the importance of Deren's work on cinema, more specifically avant-garde cinema. Avant-garde, in any form of art, be it music, films or visual arts, means experimenting with new, unusual ideas. Geller also states that Deren was inspired by the noir genre, which was quite popular in that time (Geller 140). Also, since Deren herself stars in the short film, it could be regarded as an autobiographical film, which makes the narration even more intimate, since the viewers experience the events of the film through her eyes. (Soussloff 123).

As the decades passed, female directors and writers had increasingly more influence on the industry, they were allowed to express their art more freely. Naturally, this was most true in the late twentieth century, since many women were entering the entertainment industry in that period. One of them is, of course, Jane Campion, since her first film, *Sweetie*, was released in 1989.

Laura Mulvey, one of the most prominent figures in feminist film theory, said the following about feminist film production, and the rising numbers of female filmmakers:

As woman's place in past cinematic representation has been mystified, at once a linchpin of visual pleasure and an affirmation of male dominance, so feminists now have become fascinated with the mysteries of cinematic representation itself, hidden by means of the sexualized female fantasy form... Politically, a feminist formalism is based on a rejection of the past and on giving priority to challenging the spectator's place in cinema (Mulvey 208).

This statement basically means that female characters and female filmmakers themselves did not have a significant role in the past, they were but the subject of male fantasy, and they were sexualized very often to fit in that fantasy. In other words, they were "victims" of the male gaze, because of which they did not have a chance to truly shine. However, with more and more women gaining significance and influence in the film industry, it is now their goal and responsibility to subvert these expectations and create more experimental films in order to question the viewers' beliefs and place in cinema, especially female viewers. Overall, Mulvey supports going against the male-dominated industry and the subversion of the male gaze. This will be important in later chapters of the thesis, because Campion herself goes against the male gaze in her films, even in *The Piano*, as well.

According to Kaja Silverman, narration is also an effective method in films that portray trauma. She states that it is effective because "it is associated with characters who have been scarred by major trauma", and the reason narration happens in the first place is because of these same "drastic circumstances". (Silverman 52). In conclusion to this short chapter in which some context and history was provided about narration in general, it can be said that narration and voiceover is used more frequently today than it was a few decades ago. Also, more focus and attention is given to female characters, especially when the film is directed and written by a female artist. Of course, narration is used in many different types of stories. It can be used in a "coming of age" story, which is, quite literally, when the story puts the most focus on a single character, his or her character development, therefore narration is effective, since it provides insightful details about the character's inner emotions and views the character evolves and grows older throughout the story.

Also, as Sarah Kozloff has written, in films that are using "narration to comment upon or subvert Hollywood patterns" (2).

After briefly discussing the general history of narration in films in the last chapter, it is now worth examining the importance of narration in Campion's films. Since Campion started making films in her home country, New Zealand, instead of Hollywood, she had much more say in creating those films. In Hollywood, filmmakers and other executives do not have a completely free hand in making their films, since the people behind the production company also have some criteria which need to be met in order to make and release the film without problems. In New Zealand, however, creators are allowed more leniency in the progress of making their own films. As a result, the portrayal of female narration in her films is much clearer and obvious, therefore they can be studied and analyzed more properly. Also, Campion herself said that her characters are, in some way, projections of her own self. In a journal article published in 2000, she stated that "I like to be able to project myself into the parts and being a woman I like to therefore have heroines. We don't have many, you know? So I feel like it's my job. Not a crusade—just a natural thing to want to do" (Lewis 36). The name Jane Campion became an indicator in the industry, because her filmmaking style is so unique and different. Although the criticism of her films is not always positive, even the critics that do not like her works agree that her style is undoubtedly distinctive. For example, Harriet Margolis, a professor and scholar who wrote several essays on the topic of feminism, have collected many reviews of *The Piano* and published them. All of the reviews, regardless of what they say about the film, agree that Campion is indeed a unique filmmaker. Margolis also discussed that Campion could be regarded as an auteur. In short, an auteur is a director whose style is so present in all aspects of their films that they are considered as the authors of the film (Margolis 4-10). Therefore, Campion's narrators (who are also characters) are perfect examples of female narration. Since she admittedly projects her own personality and views unto them, they are even more intimate and relatable. Regardless of the fact that her characters are often battling trauma, struggling and even depression in her films, Campion does not – more than likely intentionally – resort to portraying them as victims, or making the film's overall tone and narrative too dramatic. In the words of Kathleen A. McHugh (198): "Rather, the perspective of these texts emerges both as witty and thoughtful, engaged and dispassionate, in part because they all emphasize the storytelling as much as

the story told". Therefore, narration is very often the most important aspect of Campion's films.

2.2 Female narration in *The Piano*

In *The Piano*, there are actually different types of narration. One is Ada herself, who narrates in two ways. She is mute, so she does not communicate verbally, therefore, viewers can only hear her thoughts. With her thoughts, she also expresses her emotions. The film begins with her voiceover narration, and also ends with it. Another type of narration is the scenery itself. As discussed in the chapter titled "Portrayal of passion in *Passionless Moments* and *The Piano*", Campion constructs the visual scenery in a way that it reflects Ada's mental and emotional state, or just corresponds with it. The very first scene foreshadows Ada's muteness and her way of communicating. In the opening shot, there is only a flash of light that is blurred by what looks like a person's finger. In the next scene, Ada is revealed as she puts her hands on her face and looks through her fingers. As she is revealed, her voiceover narration begins, stating that she is mute and has not spoken since she was six years old. Due to the fact that she is mute, she mostly expresses herself with her fingers and hand gestures. It is as if her hands are the equivalents of her voice. So, the first scene of the movie cleverly puts the focus on her fingers, indicating that they are very important to them, and that they will be an important aspect of the film itself (McHugh 202). In addition to female narration and visual narration, the film also touches upon the subjects of patriarchy and colonialism. This is also confirmed early in the film, as Ada continues with her inner narration. She says that "today my father married me to a man I've not yet met. Soon my daughter and I shall join him in his own country". With this, Ada makes the plot of the film clear. Also, she is being quite ironic and witty. Although her soon-to-be husband, Alisdair Stewart, is Scottish, just like Ada, she refers to New Zealand as "his own country". This is because New Zealand was indeed a British colony, so Ada refers to it as if it was belonging to Alisdair. In a way, it was his. The same way Ada herself was soon to be his possession. She was given away by her father, like an object that is used for a transaction. Therefore, Ada finds some similarities between New Zealand and herself: in a way, they are both the prisoners of colonization and the patriarchy (202).

There are also some quite unconventional, interesting camera shots throughout the film. For instance, it is once in Alisdair's pocket. In another scene, there is an overhead shot, focused on a teacup. Firstly, the camera is Alisdair's pocket in the literal sense. From

the camera's point of view, his hand is seen as he takes out a small portrait (cameo) depicting Ada so that he can look at it and think about what she is like. This scene is also very clever, because since the cameo was in his pocket, it symbolically indicates that Ada is in his possession, just like her picture (McHugh 202-203). It also showcases Alisdair's possessive personality, because later in the film, he tries to gain a piece of land by transaction, just as he gained Ada's hand in marriage. The transactional nature of both patriarchy and colonialism is mirroring the representation of women in the context of the film. Ada is not seen as a person, as a woman, not even by her own father, because he was more than willing to give her away to marry a stranger. Therefore, in the film, patriarchy and colonialism are the enemies of women, they are the obstacles that Campion tries to overcome using the narration of Ada. However, despite Alisdair's possessive, arrogant nature and seemingly confident personality, it becomes quite obvious that he is not at all confident. As the scene progresses, glimpses of Alisdair's insecurity emerge. He and his neighbour, George, are going together to greet Ada, who was traveling by ship and arrived on the beach. When they arrive on the scene, Alisdair does not make his own opinion at first, he rather asks George what he thinks of her. Only when George tells his opinion is when Alisdair expresses his own, so he seemingly needs affirmation or guidance by others first. Also, when inspecting the cameo, he balances it in a way that it can be used as a mirror, so that he can comb his hair in order to improve his looks. Therefore, he seemingly has insecurities about his looks as well. Additionally, their first impression of Ada is also a clear display of their personalities. Alisdair only mentions that she is beautiful, while George says that she seems tired. George, rather than judging her looks, makes a comment about her well-being instead, being empathic and understanding. It is because of these qualities that Ada falls in love with him later in the film, and goes away with him to live together in peace and tranquility. Secondly, the teacup scene is a clever symbolism: in another scene, Alisdair is talking with Aunt Morag, and he mentions to her that Ada is often tapping the table as if she was playing a piano. That is the only way for her to simulate it, since her piano was left on the beach, because, according to Alisdair, there was no way for them to bring it to the house. As a result, Alisdair thinks that she is mentally ill, or that at least she has some problems. He then continues, saying that with time, she will certainly become more open to him. He is implying that in time, she will be open to physical intimacy, because she rejects his advances any time he is trying. As he says this,

there is an overhead shot¹ of the teacup, with him stirring the tea with a spoon. With pointing out the tea and teacup, a great irony is made. Tea is a significant symbol of the British people, and the British Empire itself. Tea is the sign of civilization and sophistication, which is exactly why it is used by Campion in this scene. She is using the tea and teacup so that the cruel and barbaristic nature can be hidden behind it, it serves like a curtain. The tea itself is a symbol of the cruelty of the colonization, since the tea business was very corrupt. Tea plantations were systems of corruption and exploitation (McHugh 203). There is a great irony and contrast, because although the tea itself is an example of civilized nature, it is a product of one of the most corrupt businesses that were present during the time in which the film is taking place (the mid eighteenth century). McHugh also writes that "Campion's witty but emphatic framings in these scenes imbricate the fundamental ironies of imperial and patriarchal civility through Stewart and the objects he handles—cameo and teacup" (203). However, Alisdair is not an antagonist. Or at the very least, not in the traditional sense. He is portrayed in a way that he rather evokes a feeling of resentment, rather than hate. His arrogance and ignorance are both results of colonialism. He considers himself mentally superior to other people, especially to the indigenous Māori people, who live close to his property and often interacts with them. He is set on buying their land, not showing any empathy toward them whatsoever. He even states at one point in the film that he is not even sure that the Māoris are aware that their lands belongs to them, further indicating that he thinks of himself as superior. So, rather than being a traditional antagonist, he is portrayed as a rather obnoxious figure in the story. Ada's character is unconventional, for the same reason. Mute characters in stories are more often than not portrayed that way simply because so the viewers can feel pity for them. In another words, they are the victims of the story. In *The Piano*, however, Ada's mutism is rather a powerful trait, since it makes her mysterious and perhaps more attractive. Both Stewart and George are repeatedly trying to figure out her thoughts and emotions in the film. So, Campion made mutism a source of attraction, rather than weakness (McHugh 204).

Another type of narration in Campion's *The Piano* is music itself. She uses both diegetic and non-diegetic sounds in a very sophisticated way throughout the film (McHugh 204). To provide context, diegetic sounds are the sounds that originate from within the world of the film, therefore the characters themselves can hear it. For example, a

¹ An overshed shot is when the camera is angled directly above a person or an object.

character's voice, footsteps, or in this case, the piano's sound are all diegetic sounds. In contrast to this, non-diegetic sounds are sounds that are added to the film for artistic purpose, so they are not part of the world of the film, they cannot be heard by its characters. Non-diegetic sounds are used in order to create an atmosphere, mood, or make certain scenes more emotional to the viewer. Examples for non-diegetic sounds are the film's soundtrack, and any other added sound effects. Diegetic sounds are usually more effective, because the characters can hear it as well, thus they make the film even more intimate and relatable. The piano music in the opening in the first scenes is at first associated by Campion with Ada's inner voice, which transforms all following occurrences of what would normally be viewed as non-diegetic background music into an exquisite narrational voice that permeates the setting. When Ada is looking back at her piano from the top of a cliff or when George is staring at it after she left, it is not certain where the sound of the piano can be heard from. It is not obvious what the viewers are hearing. It could be originating from Ada's own imagination, it could be George's recollections of when she played in front of him or when she gave him lessons, or it could also be a non-diegetic addition to the film. The piano music is a recurring element of the film, similar to the physical nature of the transaction between George and Ada: Ada receives the piano keys, and George's physical attraction toward her is satisfied. Also, as McHugh has stated, the music "creeps inside" the psyche of the viewers, since it is so repeatedly used throughout the two hour film (McHugh 204-205). Although numerous filmmakers have used this approach, what sets Campion's use of it in *The Piano* apart is the continuous focus on the relevance and physicality of all representation and narration that the film showcases. A Campion film's storytelling is notable for being connected to a variety of different voices and perspectives. As a result, the power and authority related confrontations and arguments that the film sets up - regardless of how unbalanced they are - are portrayed in introspective structures that prioritize narration. This element of the film challenges, and even subverts melodrama's² polarized morality for the sake of a much more nuanced and intricate interpretation of these conflicts (McHugh 205). Campion intends to ironize melodrama while keeping its potential to evoke emotion and depict conflict between individuals of unequal levels of authority. She is more interested in the conflict and repercussions of the conflict between people with uneven access to established mechanisms of power than she is in portraying her characters as victims. Toward the end

² Melodrama is an exaggerated form of drama to make the story more entertaining.

of the film, shortly after Alisdair cuts off Ada's finger as retaliation for her affair with George and to prevent her from playing the piano, he can hear Ada's voice in his head, almost as if she was able to telepathically communicate with him. She desperately wanted him to let her go with George, and, in the end, they leave together on the same beach that she first arrived to New Zealand in the beginning. In their new home with George, Ada receives a prosthetic metal finger, with which she is able to play again. Despite suffering both mentally and physically by the hands of men, Ada does not judge them in the end. Campion refuses melodrama even in the ending, because Ada could come to a great revelation that the struggles she endured were just the acts of insecure and seemingly strong, but in fact weak men, and thus she could reassure the viewers themselves that there is some form of justice. Ada is instead left with her trauma, so that she can question herself, and find a solution to her struggles by herself. Even her piano playing is stained by the past, because what once was perfect music performed by her, it is now interrupted by the sound of the prosthetic finger, because after hitting the keys, it makes an additional, clicking sound. Therefore, the story does not conclude in a traditional way, there is no resolution to all the bad that happened to her, and there is no moral lesson (McHugh 205-206).

Carol Jacob, a scholar of literature and professor, stated the following about the complex nature of the film's moral message:

In the end we must learn to live underwater. If Jane Campion's *The Piano* has a moral, this is surely it. Or rather we must come to terms as best we can with the realm this film envisions, and which we too more or less inhabit, as being underneath the sea, a new sealand, so to speak. Still, no viewer can fail to sense that this film shrouds itself in the unholy suspicion that *The Piano* may not have any moral after all. It will be difficult to make this clear (Jacobs 757).

With this statement, Jacobs approves that there is indeed no moral message. The characters and the plot itself is so complex, so intricate, that it is difficult, and perhaps even impossible to attribute a moral meaning to it. As a conclusion to her article, Jacobs yet states that "there is no moral to this story, then, at least no language that can contain the generalized truth of its statement" (Jacobs 780).

In conclusion, Jane Campion has a very distinctive style, and her uniqueness is acknowledged even by those that are not fond of her works. In addition to her portrayal of

passion, which was discussed in depth in a previous chapter, her films are notable for the intricate portrayal of narration, more specifically female narration. Since she projects her own personality and views into her characters, they consequently become more relatable and much more realistic. In relation to narration in *The Piano*, music is also important. Campion uses music as a narrative device, because Ada is so attached to her piano that sometimes, her own self intertwines with the piano, as if the piano's sound was her own voice. There is so much emphasis on the piano that it becomes a separate character on its own, which is not surprising, since the title of the film refers to it as well. The piano is not just the source of Ada's passion, but it is also a part of the protagonist's personality.

Chapter 3: Deconstruction of the male gaze in *The Piano*

In this chapter, the deconstruction of the male gaze will be discussed. In *The Piano*, Campion consciously subverts the patriarchal style of storytelling. Lecturer Feona Attwood wrote an article dedicated to this topic, titled *Weird Lullaby: Jane Campion's "The Piano"* (1998). According to Attwood, "it investigates the ways in which *The Piano* interrogates and disturbs traditional patriarchal narratives, ways of speaking and seeing, and patriarchal constructions of bodily pleasure and desire; revealing these as partial, hard of hearing, short sighted and incapable of pleasure" (Attwood 85). In short, her article is about how Campion is using a different approach in order to provide spectators a better understanding of a woman's desires and personality.

3.1 Feminine roles in male-dominated stories

Typically, men's stories about women are a collection of fictions that tell quite much about their subject matter while saying very little about it. These fictions can be classic tales of legends and folklore or scientific narratives that form the basis of debates like the ones concerning the topic of psychoanalysis. These stories are frequently presented as riddles, therefore they turn women themselves into riddles, as well. They raise questions about what a woman needs or desires, however, they do not give women the opportunity to formulate an answer to these questions. According to Teresa de Lauretis, "women are considered merely as the objects of desire, and as the objects of the question. To the extent that women 'are the question', they cannot enunciate the question; they cannot be speaking subjects of the knowledge that the question seeks" (de Lauretis 111). With this quote, de Lauretis says that women are frequently viewed as the subject of investigation, but they are never given the chance to formulate their own inquiries or influence the result of the

investigation. Women are thus excluded from the process of knowledge creation, and their experiences and viewpoints are frequently disregarded or neglected. The author draws attention to how patriarchal systems disregard and silence women, both in terms of their social standing as objects of desire and in terms of their capacity to take part in the production of knowledge. However, according to Attwood, this creates a problem, because if the males are the ones asking the questions, then it is inevitable that the answer is also meant for their expectations, for the male gaze. This way, the answer will not be what the woman wants, but rather what the man does. Therefore, in the words of de Lauretis, the "itinerary of the female's journey is guided by a compass pointing to the fulfilment of the promise made to 'the little man' and so her story is a question of his desire" (de Lauretis 133). However, this sentiment raises another point. If the man is asking the question, so the answer will be to his liking, then if instead the woman asks the question, the answer will be to her liking, which brings the discussion to Campion's film, *The Piano*. The film's plot is already deconstructing the male gaze and goes against the patriarchal expectations, because the story is not about a man's journey, but about a woman's journey. Ada takes on two journeys: one by force, since he was married to Alisdair by her father and had to travel to New Zealand, one by choice, when, in the end, she decided to run away with her new lover, George, to Nelson. In both cases, the question was about what she wants, and not about what the men around him want. Also, in the end, her question does bend the men to her will, because Alisdair telepathatically hears her voice to let her go, and she goes away with the man she loves, so eventually, everything turned out to be in her favor. In the film, there is great emphasis on the power struggles between the characters, on the inequality of authority. Throughout the film, there are several examples of imbalance: specifically the patriarchy's hold over women, and the colonizers hold over the Māori people, who are the inhabitants of New Zealand. Ada's situation is also a result of power imbalance, because she was sent away with her daughter, and she had no say in it whatsoever. Also, the Māori people are being driven out of their lands, because Alisdair intends to buy it, thus they are victims of inequality, too (Attwood 85-87).

3.2 The silence of Ada as a form of female agency

There are many classic stories both in folklore and fantasy in which there is a silent female character. However, they usually have one thing in common: they emerge from the sea. Ada herself emerges from the sea, since at the beginning of the film, she and her daughter arrive by ship to New Zealand. Acclaimed writer and scholar Marina Warner states that this fascination with silent female characters within stories might root from the legends of sirens. Sirens are humanoid, feminine, malevolent creatures, and they are often associated with danger, since, according to myths, they lure sailors to their death with their attractive and mysterious voice. In a way, they represent the dangerous sides of women, how some men fall prey to them, most often in the emotional sense. So, sirens, and any women associated with them, are both highly dangerous and very attractive (Warner 396-408). This custom implies that women are essentially unknowable and unpredictable as people, and so presents them as symbols of danger, perhaps even as death itself. In the words of Attwood, it "makes women a silence into which men speak, a blank sheet on which male desire inscribes its fears and fantasies" (Attwood 87). Alisdair's character is a perfect example for this, because to him, Ada's passion, the piano, which also happens to be her own way of self-expression, is nothing more than an object that can be transacted in exchange for the lands of the indigenous Māori people. As it was previously discussed in the *Female narration in The Piano* chapter, Ada's piano is closely associated with her personality, it is presented as if it was a part of her. Therefore, Alisdair's disrespect toward the piano could be interpreted as a disrespect toward Ada and her wishes herself, further reinforcing the argument that she is just an object of the male gaze and desire. Interestingly, the cause of Ada's mutism is not known. Not even to herself, since she mentions during one of her inner monologues, that no one knows why she is mute, not even her, nor her father. Her silence is a mystery in itself. However, it is possible that she is willingly withholding her voice, because if she started speaking, her mysteriousness would disappear, and that is probably the only quality that allows her some sort of control against the men in her life, particularly her husband, Alisdair. With her silence, she does have some power over him, because he is not really able to understand her emotions, desires, or motives. Possibly, she does not speak because "the synchronization of her appearance and her voice act as the means of her surveillance" (Attwood 88). Therefore, her silence could be her method of agency, because she uses it to have some control in her relationship with her husband. Additionally, the male gaze usually has a negative definition, because the woman is mostly seen as an object which only goal is to be desired, used, and

controlled. However, Campion refuses to let Ada be the subject of the male gaze, since her voice can never be found in her. It can only be found somewhere else entirely. For example, her voice is most often based in her hands, since playing music on the piano is her favored method of self-expression. Also, her voice is sometimes in her daughter, because in a few scenes, she translates what her mother is trying to communicate. The cinematography, the visual representation has been mentioned in the previous chapters, and it can also be mentioned in this one, because in some scenes, the *mise-en-scène* supports the argument. For instance, the very first scene of the movie can be applied to it, because at first, Ada cannot be seen, just her point of view when she puts her hand on her face and sees through her fingers. Although she is not visible, her inner narrative voice can be heard. It is an interesting and unique concept within the story, because it is almost like her inner voice is non-diegetic, since the viewers can hear it, but the characters in the film cannot. The fact that she is mute “serves to position her as inaccessible to a male gaze, while investing her disembodied voice with authority” (Attwood 88).

Campion’s unconventional storytelling and depiction of the female point of view can also be seen in how she portrays Ada’s relationship with George. Discarding contemporary traditional ways of relationships (in the mid eighteenth century women were rarely seen as equals, they were rather objects in a relationship than partners, in fact their relationships were mostly against their will), Campion portrays their affair in a surprising way. Not only is the affection between them mutual – although not initially – but the way they demonstrate their affection toward each other is quite unconventional, as well. This is mostly because of the fact that George fell in love with her through her music. In a world in which physical desire dominates over true emotions, he overcame those impulses as a result of the piano. And his interest in it was genuine, since he even wanted to take lessons from her. This further demonstrates that Ada’s personality is projected into music, into the piano. She is able to convey her emotions with the help of music so effectively that George is completely impressed by her personality, her very being itself. Ultimately, her “music marks an insistent, ravishing kind of speech which knocks against the sides of the story, refusing to be wrapped up neatly inside it. Ada will not give a coherent or credible account of herself within the terms of narrative” (Attwood 89). With all these narrative techniques, Campion deconstructs the male gaze, she is refusing to let her character be an object of it.

Conclusion

Firstly, the importance of passion in Jane Campion's works was discussed, more specifically in one of her earliest works, a short film titled *Passionless Moments*, and in one of her most significant films, *The Piano*. Campion's depiction of passion is outstanding, because she puts emphasis on the mundane, even boring aspects of life, as opposed to associating passion with extraordinary occurrences, for example special events. The difference between drive and desire plays an important part in science behind passion. On the one hand, desire has a definite ending in sight. For example, if the protagonist of the *The Piano* would prefer desire over drive, she would have a clear destination, the film would culminate in a grand piano concert or something of a similar nature. On the other hand, drive is seemingly endless. There is no grand concert at the end, just the act of playing the piano and pursuing the hobby satisfies the drive. In other words, passion, in Campion's point of view, does not revolve around certain objects, but rather focuses on the experiences that the character goes through as a result. In *The Piano*, the visuals are also used as a means of narration. When Ada is trying to find her place within her new home, the camera focuses on the many objects that are metaphorically suffocating her, and also on the landscapes. In contrast, when she is playing the piano, the focus is not on the environment, but on her. The camera shows close-up shots of her fingers as she is playing, and her face is shown, since she smiles in the meantime, and it almost looks like that she is smiling unconsciously, because that is the only situation in which she can be her own true self.

Secondly, Campion's use of female narration was the topic. The main argument of the chapter was that Campion uses unconventional ways in her employment of female narration. It was mentioned that her style is so distinctive that some critics, even those who do not like her films, acknowledge this fact. For example, Harriet Margolis argues that Campion has earned the right to be called an auteur, a filmmaker whose style and influence is so present in every aspect of her films that she is rightfully called an author (Margolis 4-10). Another important aspect of female narration in Campion's works is the fact that she admittedly projects her own personality into the characters, thus enabling them to be more relatable and realistic (Lewis 36). Music is also a narrative device in *The Piano*, because Ada relies so much upon it that she basically becomes one with it. The fact that Alisdair cut one of her fingers off so that she will not be able to play the piano is a strong indicator

of her passion toward music. Arguably, the piano is a character in itself within the story, which could also be the reason as to why it is the title of the film.

Finally, in the last main chapter of the thesis, the topic was the deconstruction of the male gaze in *The Piano*. It was argued that most traditional stories are male-dominated, hence the female characters in them are depicted through the lens of the male gaze. As a result, the questions raised about women by men, is answered also by men, since women are not allowed to formulate an answer to them. Because of this, the answer is not realistic, because it is what the man wants. This way, the woman's desire and will has to conform to the man's. However, Campion found a way around this problem. She simply raised the same question, only from the female perspective. It was my argument that Ada's will eventually becomes the men's will as well, because ultimately, she manages to push Alisdair away, and to pull George closer. She gets a relatively happy ending: she runs away with the man he loves, her daughter is happy, her lost finger is replaced by a prosthetic one, and she even begins to regain her voice. The ending is fitting for the film, because it is the opposite of typical male-dominated stories.

All of these points are indicators that the idea of female agency can be applied to Campion's films. For example, in the film, the protagonist, Ada, is subject to male oppression. Her autonomy and agency is oppressed by the male figures in her life, because she did not want to marry Alisdair, it was her father's will. Therefore, she was being oppressed by male agency. Then, she was the subject and victim of her husband's agency. Their relationship was abusive, both physically and emotionally. Alisdair continuously disregarded and disrespected her feelings. Ada's most precious belonging, her piano, was left behind because of her husband, taking away her only form of self-expression. She was also abused physically in the most extreme way, because her husband cut off one of her fingers. Ada is also mute. In the beginning of the film, she has not spoken a single word since her childhood, and this silence could also be interpreted as an expression of her agency. Ada, despite being oppressed by her husband, does what she wants to do, even though these actions have harsh consequences, for example, losing a finger. It can also be seen in her relationship with George that there is a significantly less chance of domestic violence if the two parties have more balanced roles. With Alisdair, Ada did not really have a chance, because she did not want to be with him in the first place. As a result of forced marriage, inequality and power imbalance is inevitable, the woman will be always the subordinate. However, she feels genuine affection towards George, which progressively develops throughout the film. This is the

reason for the peaceful nature of their relationship, it is more balanced, because both of them initiated it. In such relationships, the parties will respect each other more, they will both have a greater sense of agency, autonomy, and freedom.

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NYILATKOZAT

Alulírott Kónya Zoltán Alex, büntetőjogi felelősségem tudatában kijelentem, hogy az általam benyújtott, Representation of femininity in Jane Campion's works című szakdolgozat (diplomamunka) önálló szellemi termékem. Amennyiben mások munkáját felhasználtam, azokra megfelelően hivatkozom, beleértve a nyomtatott és az internetes forrásokat is.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy a szakdolgozat elektronikus példánya a védés után az Eszterházy Károly Egyetem könyvtárába kerül elhelyezésre, ahol a könyvtár olvasói hozzájuthatnak.

Kelt: Szeptember, 2023 év 04 hó 16 nap.

Kónya Zoltán Alex

aláírás

