'Intelligent Female Nonsense': Pastoral, National Identity, and Shakespearean Misrule in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945)

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Abstract

Powell and Pressburger's oneiric wartime films, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945), both feature independent female characters whose respective trajectories across Britain betray contemporary anxieties regarding the rise of the mobile woman, and with it, female agency. Crucially, the films' dreamlike settings of Chillingbourne and Moy are characterised by a "sense of magic, sometimes utopian, sometimes threatening, sometimes surreal."[1] As the landscapes becomes invested with the thrilling potentiality of a Mythical dreamscape, it becomes clear that anything can, and probably will, happen: In *A Canterbury Tale,* a falcon turns into a Spitfire in an outlandish 600-year matchcut, while a train meanders amongst kitsch tartan hills in *I Know Where I'm Going!*

This paper argues that both narratives employ mythscapes to foster a sense of historical continuity, and in turn, promote conservative ideas of national identity. Invoking the pastoral via Chaucerian pilgrimages and ancient Scottish curses, both films are imbued with nostalgia—nostalgia for a fairy-tale space that never really was. Chillingbourne's blackout and Moy's thick fog betray their mythic status: they are really dreamscapes, unreal, mystical spaces that resist historical change and effectively evade the gendered realities of wartime Britain. Alison Smith (Sheila Sim), and Joan Webster's (Wender Hiller) transformative encounters with these spaces ultimately curtail their mobility and effect their (re)absorption within normative femininity. Yielding spaces locked in a reimagined past which disingenuously conceals conservative gender-politics, both films finally disremember Britain as an "essentially rural and essentially unchanging" nation.[2]

Keywords: Gender, Pastoral, WII, Mythical Landscape, Powell and Pressburger

[1] Andrew Moor, *Powell and Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces* (London: IB Tauris, 2005) 3.
[2] Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of Industrial Spirit: 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 46.

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's wartime films, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945), both feature an independent, urban, female protagonist, whose trajectory across Britain dramatises contemporary anxieties regarding wartime gender roles. Mobile women Alison Smith (Sheila Sim) and Joan Webster (Wendy Hiller) each interrupt their intended journeys and cross over into idiosyncratic, pastoral territory. Respectively set in the Kentish country village of Chillingbourne, and the Scottish Isle of Mull, both films are characterised by landscapes imbued with myth and oneirism. In *A Canterbury Tale*, a mysterious local vigilante incongruously pours glue into women's hair. Wartime 'topsy-turvy' so pervades Chillingbourne that one of its visitors concludes that 'the whole village's cracked'. In *I Know Where I'm Going!* (henceforth *IKWIG* to adopt The Archers' own acronym), magical Scottish curses and Norwegian legends abound, and a thick fog envelops Mull's landscape to striking Gothic effect. This unapologetic strangeness pervades even *IKWIG*'s dialogue. Unable to travel to the island Kiloran, Joan calls upon local aristocrat Catriona Potts (Pamela Brown) whose huge hounds frequently monopolise the beds and sofas. She invites Joan to spend the night: 'It's no trouble at all,' she says, adding contradictorily 'I haven't heard any intelligent female nonsense for months.'

Both films' bizarrely beguiling pastorals are as seductive as they are perplexing; it is therefore tempting to read these texts as oneiric voyages of 'self-realisation' (Harper 2000, 41). Echoing Powell's assertion that *A Canterbury Tale* looks 'on the surface conventional' but is in fact 'filled with subversive material' (Powell 1987, 438), critics such as Antonia Lant (1991, 1996) and Sue Harper (1996, 2000) have wished to visit something gender-politically bold upon Alison and Joan. For Lant, 'the blackout and the mobile woman' of *A Canterbury Tale* 'were the basis of new dramatic forms' providing a crucial space for the renegotiation of gender identity demanded by WWII (1991, 219). Harper, on the other hand, recognises that 'films expressing traditional gender values can often be stunningly beautiful', citing Powell's *The Edge of the World* (1937) as an example (2000, 3). She nonetheless sees progressive '*non-traditional* images of women' in Alison and Joan, describing them as 'autonomous and wilful, […] resourceful and demanding' (1996, 206, original emphasis). She goes on to contend that:

> the aristocratic or gentry topos was a key *enabling device* for the production of iconoclastic images of women. Such images, dangerous as

> they were, could not enter 'naked' into the world of art: they required protective clothing. (1996, 208, original emphasis)

In Harper's view, only through the 'protective clothing' of an enabling gentry could Powell and Pressburger depict the 'terrifying spectacle of women getting their own way' (1996, 210). Taking issue with this reading, this paper argues that although *A Canterbury Tale* and *IKWIG* appear subversive on the surface, both films teem with conventional material. Like Andrew Moor (2005) and Tison Pugh (2009), I contend that both films can be viewed through the lens of pastoral literature, a context which illuminates both films' investment in spurious wartime fantasies of rural Britain. I additionally suggest that Shakespearean misrule provides a crucial framework to untangle seemingly irreconcilable interpretations of the films. The ostensibly benevolent 'enabling' gentry, I will show, functions as an embodiment of pastoral and misrule, a *dis*abling device systematically deployed against, and designed to neutralise the threat posed by, non-traditional women. Both films cloak not 'the terrifying spectacle of women getting their own way' (Harper 1996, 210), but the age-old taming narrative of men getting their own way over 'intelligent female nonsense'.

Contexts: Pastoral, National Identity, and Shakespearean Misrule

Pastoral literature is, by definition, deceptive. Foregrounding the 'nostalgic' and 'idealised' aspects of the genre, S.K. Heninger suggests that pure pastoral describes 'some half-remembered place in archaic terms, a nostalgic reminiscence of an idealised child-scape' (1961, 255). Thematically, pastoral opposes 'simple to complicated life, to the advantage of the former' (Abrams 2005, 211), where the 'simple life' is that of the rural folk. As Frank Kermode notes, 'this idea that the world has been a better place and that men have degenerated is […] a regular feature of pastoral poetry' (1972, 14). *A Canterbury Tale* and *IKWIG* certainly subscribe to this view, staging binary oppositions of rural/ urban, simple/ complicated, mysticism/ materialism, male/ female, and aesthetically privileging the idealised, rural settings of Chillingbourne and Mull to the detriment of an off-screen, urban, industrialised Britain. *A Canterbury Tale'*s iconography, with its 'patchwork of meadows and pasture' (Lowenthal 1991, 213), certainly taps into the collective imaginary of 'England as a garden'. Crucially, David Lowenthal notes, 'only after the pre-Raphaelites did the recognisable English landscape

become an idealised medieval vision' (1991, 213). The myth of Britain as 'essentially rural and essentially unchanging', which also resonates with *IKWIG*'s war-resistant mystical fabric, is known as the 'southern metaphor' (Wiener 2004, 46). This reactionary myth was particularly potent during WWII, functioning as a trope to 'represent the central qualities of the nation at large' (Moor 2005, 88). Since cinema is a means 'of re-imagining the dispersed […] populace as a tight-knit, value-sharing collectivity' (Higson 2000, 65), films are ideally placed to (re)formulate notions of nationhood and national identity—however fallacious. Evading the realities of WWII Britain, an essentially urban, essentially dynamic nation, reliant on women's work, *A Canterbury Tale* and *IKWIG* employ pastoral tropes as a means to 'offset the devastation of war' (Moor 2005, 88-91). In much the same way, pastoral literature's celebration of the rustic evades its inherently urban origin: for, as Kermode notes 'the first condition of pastoral is that it is an urban product' (1972, 14). Ironically then, 'pure pastoral must be artificial because it describes what it is not' (Heninger 1961, 256).

The use of structuring binary oppositions and seemingly irreconcilable readings resonates with Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night,* whose cross-dressing heroine usefully illuminates the wartime inversions of *A Canterbury Tale* and *IKWIG.* Alison and Joan's status as mobile women who trouble traditional gender roles by leaving the home notably parallels Viola's apparently empowering gender-bending masquerade. However, it is worth noting that Viola adopts male attire in Illyria for fear being of 'deliver'd to the world' (Shakespeare 2007, I.i.43). Her cross-dressing, I argue, is symptomatic of *Twelfth Night*'s larger phenomenon of 'misrule and topsy-turvy as serving to ultimately reaffirm the dominant, aristocratic values' of the ruling class (Coddon 1993, 309). By the same token, 'insubordination, cross-dressing and unruly "license" are […] contained by the rites of unmasking and marriage' (Coddon 1993, 309). As I will show, in the logic of carnivalesque containment, the 'topsy-turvy' inversions of WWII, characterised by non-traditional women destabilising the gender binary, eventually reify the power of the benevolent, ruling gentry of Chillingbourne and Mull through conservative regendering and heteronormative marriage. Given both films' reliance on inherently deceptive, paradoxical tropes, it is no surprise that the texts themselves should be so slippery, so tricky to interpret: by deploying pastoral rhetoric and Shakespearean misrule, both films accommodate precisely these kinds of contradictions. *A Canterbury Tale* can both critique the commodification of culture through filming and participate in the act of commodification; it can simultaneously

suggest that modernity threatens the integrity of the countryside, and require the pinnacle of that modernity—modern warfare—to protect it, it can both critique the Glueman's methods, but celebrate his logic. Similarly, *IKWIG* can both champion Joan's agency and simultaneously work to suppress it; it can privilege mystical female curses and yet have these reclaimed by the very male lineage the curse targets. Both films can delight in powerful, determined women and yet dismiss their contributions as 'intelligent female nonsense'. In short, pastoral imagery, cross-fertilised with Shakespearean misrule and a renewed emphasis on the southern metaphor, disingenuously answer the wartime question 'Why We Fight', whilst strategically eschewing the need to re-examine woman's place in society.

Fallacious Myth and History in *A Canterbury Tale*

In *A Canterbury Tale*, Chillingbourne's blackout and fog traps latter-day pilgrims Alison, Bob Johnson (Sgt. John Sweet) and Peter Gibbs (Dennis Price) in a backward-looking, topsy-turvy, sexualised pastoral and forces them to reconnect with Britain's past. In order to end dalliances between Chillingbourne girls and billeted soldiers which not only disrupt normative sexuality but also distract soldiers from learning about local history, queer-coded local magistrate Thomas Colpeper (Eric Portman) pours 'sticky stuff' into girls' hair at night. At its most basic level, Colpeper's project seeks to establish historical continuity between Chillinbourne's Chaucerian past and WWII present. The notion of continuity is often raised, Peter Hutchings explains, when 'national identity is under threat' (2004, 36). It is therefore no coincidence that *A Canterbury Tale*'s landscape shots reference the collective imaginary of the typically 'English' countryside, locating the film within the continuation of pastoral literature and contemporary British visual art. Stella Hockenhull, for example, situates Powell and Pressburger's work within the Neo-Romantic tradition, which often 'drew inspiration from the rugged British Landscape,' (2005, 54).[1]

A Canterbury Tale's investment in spurious ideas of continuity is problematised by the film's opening. Slowly tracking along a medieval map of Canterbury, the film cuts to Chaucerian pilgrims. The celebrated matchcut follows, connecting a medieval falcon to a WWII Spitfire and visually revealing both the continuities and discontinuities of history. While the contrasting period costume hints at historical disjuncture, the two rhyming low angle shots of the same actor simultaneously

reinscribe the notion of continuity. Meanwhile, the narrator, having judicially borrowed Chaucer's prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, narrates the changes of wartime Britain in faux-Chaucerian verse. Note in bold the words which suggest continuation, and those in italics which emphasise change:

> Six hundred years have *passed*. What would they see,
> Dan Chaucer and his goodly company?
> Today the hills and valleys are the **same**.
> *Gone* are the forests since the enclosures came.
> Hedgerows have *sprung*. The land is under *plow*,
> And orchards *bloom* with blossom on the bough.
> Sussex and Kent are like a garden fair,
> But sheep **still graze** upon the ridges there.
> The Pilgrims' Way **still winds** above the weald,
> Through wood and break and many a fertile field.
> But though **so little's changed** since Chaucer's day,
> *Another kind* of **pilgrim** walks the way.
> Alas, when on our pilgrimage we wend,
> We *modern* pilgrims see *no journey's end*.
> *Gone* are the ring of hooves, the creak of wheel.
> Down in the valley runs our road of *steel*.
> *No genial host* at *sinking* of the sun welcomes us in.
> Our journey's just *begun*. [emphasis added]

In line with literary tradition, pastoral is invoked precisely because it is under threat. Here it is modernity, characterised by soulless, sinister 'roads of steel', which threatens the Pilgrims' Way. This metaphor is later literalised when Alison's peaceful ride through the countryside is violently interrupted by soldiers converging on her with armoured vehicles. In the poem, the present is characterised by absences: 'gone are the forests', 'gone are the ring of hooves, the creak of wheel', 'no genial host'. Although time has allowed Sussex and Kent to blossom 'like a garden fair', war looms as a sinister force with roads 'of steel'. The line 'We […] see no journey's end' implicitly condemns modernity's lack of a foreseeable destination: only the curative landscape can restore the pilgrim's purpose.

Despite temporal markers then, both the matchcut and the poem 'conservatively bind past to present' (Moor 2005, 11) by investing in what Catherine Belsey describes as 'history as costume drama or the reconstruction of the present in fancy dress' (1985, 2). Belsey's analysis of Renaissance drama seems particularly resonant here:

> The project is to explain away the surface strangeness of another century in order to release its profound continuity with the present. The past is read as—and for—evidence that change is always only superficial, that human nature, what it means to be a person […] is palpably unchanging. This

> history militates against radical commitment by denying the possibility of change. (1985, 2).

Continuity is therefore a suspect historical construct designed to disremember both past and present. The point of the matchcut seems to be to highlight the 'surface strangeness', the signifiers of change, in order to better dismiss them. The rhyming low angle shots of pilgrim and soldier finally suggest that 'what it means to be a person', or a pilgrim, is 'palpably unchanging'. This sense of continuity between pilgrims and soldiers is later reinforced at Colpeper's lecture. Evoking the heterogeneity of the armed forces, he says 'I don't know what you do in civil life, you might be a cook, clerk, doctor, lawyer, merchant'. With each enumerated profession, the camera cuts quickly to a different face in the audience; by reminding them that 'as much as 600 years ago, doctors, lawyers, clerks, and merchants passed here on the Pilgrims' Way', the film once again claims the soldiers as pilgrims. The film's conclusion similarly sees Alison, Bob and Peter receive their respective blessings once their pilgrimage to Canterbury is complete.

While *A Canterbury Tale*'s male pilgrims Peter and Bob's association with the pastoral compensates for the damages of wartime disillusion, Alison's trajectory is less straightforward. Keen to contribute to the war effort by joining the Woman's Land Army, she is a typically 'empowered' WWII creature. Silhouetted in the Chillingbourne blackout, in a noirish introduction, she is ostensibly granted detective-like agency. Although Alison meets Harper's definition of a '*non-traditional*' woman (1996, 206), this framework crucially fails to account for the film's consistent attacks on, and devaluation of, women's mobility, work, language and knowledge. Discourse surrounding the Glueman attacks, for example, deploys victim-blaming language to suggest that promiscuous, (mobile) women deserve to be punished, and their mobility curtailed. The parallels between the glue attacks and sexual assaults are striking: 'it's happened to other girls, none of them died' Prudence Honeywood (Freda Jackson) pragmatically observes. When Colpeper, soon revealed to be the culprit, is asked 'you're not going to defend pouring glue on people?' he responds, 'Certainly not. But I'm going to defend pouring knowledge into people's heads. By force if necessary'. Problematically, Colpeper views (sexualised) assaults on women as 'necessary', beneficial, devices for the patriotic enlightening of men.

Appealing to paternalistic imagery, he explains, 'some children hate going to school, their parents have to force them to go'. Crucially Colpeper's school-going children are all male. Though Alison critiques Colpeper's exclusion of women ('didn't it ever occur to you to ask the girls to your lectures?' she asks), the film nonetheless allows him to emerge as the hero of the piece. The perversity of such a misogynistic hero foreshadows the explicitly perverse sexuality of Powell's later film *Peeping Tom* (1960). As Alexander Doty observes, 'what is amazing about this [train] sequence is how the misogynist glue attacks' condemned by the film 'are now justified as a patriotic means of preserving normative sexuality' (2006, 51). Note the following exchange between Bob and Peter, which almost begs to describe the film itself, and its perplexingly 'nutty' and 'cracked' but ultimately endearingly logic:

> Bob: The nutty thing is, I like him.
> Peter: Who?
> Bob: Gluepeper!
> Peter: He's a bit cracked but I like him too.

Despite Colpeper's exclusion of women, it is ironically clear that Alison is the only individual interested in his teachings. Their intellectual kinship is suggested in the lecture scene through 'symmetrical patterns of light fall[ing] on her face and Colpeper's, as the shots cut between them' (Lant 1991, 208). Having Alison mesmerised by Colpeper's lecture authorises his conservatism; his methods may be unorthodox, the film suggests, but even a victim of his crimes can see that his intentions are pure.

Moor notes that the tropes of the blackout and the mobile woman, as deployed by *A Canterbury Tale*

> bear comparison with the renegotiations of the gender system found in Shakespearean pastoral comedy. The prevalence of uniformed women brought with it a reassessment of femininity, just as Rosalind's cross-dressing allows for a contemplation of the construction of gender within the playful space of Arden [in *As You Like It*]. In *A Canterbury Tale*, both Chillingbourne and the anarchic, absolute and ludic potential of the blackout recall that forest. (2005, 96)

Like Moor, I detect the tropes of pastoral comedies such as *As You Like It* in *A Canterbury Tale*, but importantly, also those of the misrule-imbued, gender-bending comedy *Twelfth Night.* The air of folly which breezes through Illyria resonates with the ludic, topsy-turvy dimension of Chillingbourne. The sense that the world has been

turned upside down by war is repeatedly reference throughout the film, first with Bob's sergeant stripes which are 'the wrong way up', then by the hotel owner who has seen 'some topsy-turvy things in this war and last,' as well as the next morning when Bob cannot tell whether it is 8:00 AM or 8:00 PM. Significantly for a wartime film, the only acts of war represented on screen are framed as play: the soldiers' play as they 'capture' Alison's horse-drawn cart, and the children's elaborate war games. However, just as the festivities of *Twelfth Night* must come to an end, and see normative class and gender norms reinscribed, so *A Canterbury Tale* suggests that war and its inversions will end to the benefit of the ruling class. At the end of the film, Peter's blessing both grants him his wish of playing on a church organ, and distracts him from seeking the Canterbury inspector to 'out' Colpeper. Bob, meanwhile learns that 'his girl' has been writing him all along, effectively dispelling the unpatriotic possibility of a flirtation between Bob and Alison. Alison's own blessing is the news that her presumed-dead fiancé has been found alive in Gibraltar, bringing the promise of her reabsorption into heteronormative romance.

In Harper's view, Alison's 'connection with the gentry' leads to 'self-realisation', where Colpeper is 'a conduit through which a sense of the past can flow; through him she gains real blessings, regardless of the absurdities of his misogyny' (2000, 41). I argue that Alison finds 'self-realisation' through Colpeper only inasmuch as he happens to be nearby when she hears the news. More importantly, this welcome 'blessing' is achieved at the cost of her mobility. In Chillingbourne, she cannot walk alone at night, and even with an escort she is attacked by the Glueman. Colpeper then refuses to employ her on his farm, dismissing the help of the WLA, and with it, all mobile women. Alison later finds that the tyres of her caravan have been requisitioned: bereft of its wheels, it is stripped of its mobility. Finally, she is scolded for not leaving her address with the garage-owner, meaning her fiancé's father has been waiting in Canterbury for two weeks to share the news. At every turn, the ostensibly idyllic countryside and its representative gentry have proved sinister, attacking or curtailing her freedom of movement. Significantly, the last time we see Alison, she is pictured in the cathedral, led to the service by her future father in law. He puts an arm around her shoulder: a gentle, protective gesture no doubt, but also a symbolic one signalling the successful taming of Alison's shrewish, and inconvenient mobility.

Unlike Harper, I cannot dismiss Colpeper's misogyny as mere 'absurdities'. His exclusion of women from knowledge-acquisition is woven into the film's pastoral

fabric. In an early scene, while Alison struggles to find common ground with Old Horton (Edward Rigby), Bob effortlessly bonds with him over carpentry. Moor suggests this is a moment in which 'shared rural vocabulary' transcends 'national boundaries' (2005, 101). This 'shared rural vocabulary', I contend, is really a shared language of masculinity, as evidenced in the following exchange:

> Alison: How did you manage to get round to Mr. Horton in that way? […]
> Bob: We speak the same language.
> Alison: I'm English and we don't speak the same language.
> Bob: He knows about wood, and so do I.

In a film brimming with innuendos ('I'll show you a real flashlight!' exclaims Bob in the blackout, before being reprimanded for the potency of his phallic object), it is almost impossible not to read Bob's 'wood' as sexual. Despite her own 'intelligent female nonsense', Alison does not 'know about wood', i.e. masculinity, so she cannot 'get round to Mr Horton'. Similarly, at the end of the lecture scene, Alison tells Colpeper she intends to donate the coins found by her fiancé (an archaeologist aptly-named Geoffrey) to the Institute, thus transforming a private, female, sexual memory into male-authored, public history. As Lant argues, the film

> serves to make history natural, presents history as embedded in nature: in roads, in cathedrals, in coins […] But it also intimates that woman is too close to the land to fully understand that history, to make it function publicly in the interests of patriotism (1991, 208).

In celebrating history and patriotism the film effectively suppresses Alison's *her*story. A similar appropriation occurs when June's (Kim Hunter) private tears over her lover Peter Carter (David Niven), are turned into crucial public evidence in the heavenly court of *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell and Pressburger, 1946). Both films thus hierarchise female and male modes of knowing and remembering; finally concluding that women's private (re)collections are only valuable if they can be made to mean in, and incorporated into, male-authored history. Alison's conversion is complete by the time she communes with the Pilgrim's Way. Just as Colpeper mandates, she hears the lost 'ring of hooves, the creak of wheel', sounds which he notes 'come from inside, and only when you're concentrating, when you believe strongly in something'. In other words, Alison now 'strongly believes in' Colpeper's brand of patriarchy, and reaps its Chaucerian rewards. In the end, the mobile woman has no place in male-authored history, much like her coins, she must adhere to male dictates, to achieve representability. Safely re-feminised, she trades her masculine WLA gear and updo for a

feminine floral dress and softly curled hair: Alison's transformative encounter with pastoral and its representative gentry predictably yields conformist femininity.

Suppressing Materialist Agency in *I Know Where I'm Going!*

It is aboard the Glasgow sleeper, as Joan dreams of her upcoming nuptials to her employer, the rich industrialist Sir Robert Bellinger, that *IKWIG* begins its taming of Joan's shrewish femininity. The camera tracks away from her contented-looking sleeping face, to her wedding dress hanging in its plastic covering. The dress then magically vanishes but the shiny sheen remains superimposed over the sequence, functioning as a 'literal dream screen [...] a surface onto which desires are projected' (Gunning 2005, 100). In the dream, Joan's father (George Carney) performs the marriage ceremony; behind him, we discern strange turning wheels printed in negative. Tom Gunning notes that they are 'the balance wheels of large church bells […] printed not only in negative but upside down,' (2005, 100). Significantly, the dream sequence sees Joan marry Consolidated Chemical Industries (CCI), rather than Robert. This marriage, Pam Cook argues, with 'all the attributes of a well-planned business deal,' elevates Joan's status and she is 'showered with money and expensive consumer goods' (2002, 27). The jazzy soundtrack of the dream-wedding is then replaced by a chorus of rhythmic, mechanical voices: 'charged to your account', 'everything's arranged, everything's arranged', 'perfect fit, perfect fit'. The scene climaxes with the frenzied repetition of 'charge it, charge it, charge it…' just as Joan is pictured, left of frame, upright and expressionless, bills and paperwork falling to her right. This dream, Cook argues, indicates that Joan sees the wedding dress as 'a magical object that will empower her, giving her access to the luxurious lifestyle she desires' (2002, 64). It is worth noting that this 'luxurious lifestyle' is what Joan has aspired to from a very young age: at five years old, she writes to Father Christmas to request silk stockings—and receives artificial ones at the age of twelve. Marriage to Robert, or indeed his company, would mark the realisation of 'everything I've ever wanted since I've wanted anything'.

The estrangement of the familiar through the use of negatives and the inversion of the church bells contribute to the *unheimlich* nature of the dream sequence, the suggestion being that wartime female empowerment is itself an uncanny inversion, an emphemeral masquerade. This uncanny double inversion yields a mechanised dimension to the scene: the wheels of the church bells visually rhyme with the wheels of

the train and evoke the ruthless forward motion of capitalist modernity. The frenetic robotic repetition of the phrases 'everything's arranged' and 'charge it' similarly hint at the soullessness of female material empowerment. The excess of this material fantasy moreover suggests that Joan's desires are wastefully unpatriotic, conflicting with the national ethos of restraint at a time when many consumer goods were rare or rationed. Cook notably observes that the wedding dress is 'made of satin, a very rare commodity during the war' (2002 63). While Powell notoriously characterised *IKWIG* as a 'crusade against materialism' (Aldgate and Richards 1999, 62), this sequence foreshadows that it is not just Joan's consumerism that will need curbing, but also the soulless empowerment it grants women. This agency becomes increasingly dangerous as the narrative progresses, and Joan must be made to give it up. Later in the film, for example, Joan uses her material wealth to bribe inexperienced Kenny (Murdo Morrison) to take her across to Kiloran despite the gale. The 'raging seas of the Corryvreckan sweep [the wedding dress] overboard as Torquil, Kenny and Joan fight for their lives' (Cook 2002, 64). This scene can arguably be read as the realisation that wealth has only afforded Joan a false empowerment characterised by the foolish belief that money can purchase control over the forces of nature. However it is my contention that the film portrays this mistaken belief as a particular brand of 'intelligent female nonsense'. The loss of the satin wedding dress—a symbol of feminine materialism—marks the disappearance of Joan's agency. It is the masculine intervention of love interest Torquil MacNeil (Roger Livesey) which saves the day, suggesting that, as man, and as member of the gentry, he is a match for, and can assert his agency over, the forces of nature.

The loud and frenzied dream wedding sequence starkly contrasts with the peacefully eccentric depiction of Scotland that follows. The loud chorus is now silent, a voice softly sings 'You'll take the high road/I'll take the low road/I'll be in Scotland afore ye', and finally whispers 'Next station Gretna Green'. The image is delightfully weird; both cartoonish and pastoral, Scotland is signified via a 'kitsch theatricalised landscape of rolling tartan hills' (Cook 2002, 33). Significantly, Gretna Green, one of the first villages after the Scottish border, was known as a popular wedding venue for runaway marriages. The toy train then euphemistically 'enters a tunnel just under the mountain's kilt' (Gunning 2005, 101-102) while a male voice whispers 'you're over the border now'. Not just a 'witty dirty joke' (Gunning 2005, 101); the image suggests that the act of crossing into Scottish territory will awake in Joan 'natural' desires intrinsically linked to the landscape. These impulses, will, in turn, tamper her

'unnatural' materialist tendencies. Joan's *unheimlich* dream therefore marks her entry into a liminal dreamscape which will effect a change of direction. The male kilts and female train suggest an intriguing reversal of gendered stereotypes; a reversal which can indeed be read in the context of *IKWIG*'s revision of the traditional male/female binary. On one hand, Torquil, a kilt-wearing man, is associated with nature, with both an island and an eagle as his namesake, on the other, Joan decidedly urban, is linked to materialism, technology, artifice and selfishness. However, since pastoral privileges nature over artifice, the film implicitly favours masculinity over femininity.

Crossing the border into Scotland progressively disconnects Joan from urban modernity. When Joan's detailed itinerary is caught by the wind and 'consigned to the depths of the ocean', Cook observes, 'there could hardly be a clearer sign that a frontier has been reached' (2002, 45). This moment moreover signifies Joan's increasing powerlessness in the face of mythic pastoral spaces. In the logic of *IKWIG,* her materialist fantasies conflict with, and must eventually give way to, Wordsworthian communion with nature. Significantly, her love interest, Laird of Kiloran, Torquil, is simply addressed as 'Kiloran'. With this semantic double, *IKWIG* blurs the boundaries between the erotic subject and an erotically charged landscape: the only way to reach the island of Kiloran is for Joan to romantically connect with its homonymous owner. The erotic motif of frontier spaces is visually crystallised when Joan, photographed in silhouette, enters Catriona's home. In a striking, expressionist tableau, which the film repeatedly references, she pauses on the threshold. She does not yet know that Erraig House and its aristocratic inhabitants will cause her to drastically reassess her desires; from now on, Joan is not quite sure where she is going.

As the narrative progresses, threshold spaces become further eroticised. 'Shall I tell you what it's like inside [Moy castle]?', Joan playfully asks Torquil. Like Moor, I interpret Joan's question as an 'unconscious sexual connotation' of female interiority (2005, 123). In fact, Moy castle and its curse are fascinatingly feminised; the interior is full of womb-like receptacles and Gothic imagery which pique Torquil's curiosity and invite penetration. Moor suggests that by breaching the castle's walls for the first time, Torquil 'is symbolically […] consummating their relationship,' (2005, 124). During this symbolic intercourse, a female voice, presumably his nanny's, narrates the ancient legend, which states that should Kiloran

> ever cross the threshold of Moy castle, never shall he leave it a free man. He shall be chained to a woman to the end of his days and shall die in his chains.

Crucially, it is a woman of the MacLaine clan who curses the MacNeil men, the curse itself promises male subservience to a woman, and it is a female narrator passes on the story of the curse. Given this proliferation of female voices and the striking metaphor of male imprisonment in marriage, it is understandably tempting to see *IKWIG*'s final sequence as a celebration of female agency. Moor, for example, sees Joan's 'marching behind the pipers in a forthright, determined, independent manner, to claim' Torquil as a striking example of Powell and Pressburger's 'proto-feminist respect for female agency and intelligence' (2005, 124-125). However, I wish to complicate this reading and suggest that when Torquil enters the castle in full knowledge of the curse that awaits him, he is, in fact, deliberately triggering the curse in a desperate bid to reclaim Joan before she crosses to Kiloran. The curse effectively secures her attachment: if he is 'chained' to Joan 'to the end of his days', it follows that she, too, will be chained. In a perplexing ideological sleight of hand concomitant with the paradoxes of Shakespearean misrule, the very moment which is celebrated by Moor as marking protofeminist agency signals its opposite: its final suppression.

Albeit marking a reversal of the male narration of the start of the film, the female voiceover nonetheless functions as a female enforcer of the heteropatriarchy whom, much like Birdie and Catriona, is intent on challenging Joan's agency. Birdie's rhetoric is especially moving:

> Some folks there are who want to drown fine young men and break girls' hearts, so that they can be wedded one day sooner [...] Who are you to be giving orders? You that comes with your airs and graces and your heart of stone?

Joan's determination to reach Kiloran despite the gale is characterised as selfish ('break girls' hearts', 'heart of stone'), and dangerous ('drown fine young men'). Torquil's sustained breaching of Joan's personal space, as well as his violent torment in the stairs sequence further erodes Joan's agency and simultaneously reveals the sinister undercurrents of Torquil's mysticism. It is not merely his aristocratic attraction, then which is at work, but a violent desire to exercise control over Joan's mobility. The same is true of the film's male voiceover: in narrating Joan's early life in a gently mocking tone, the male narrator appropriates her actions: 'When Joan was only one-year old she

already knew where she was going. Going right? Left? No, straight on!' What seems harmless is in fact symptomatic of the film's obsessive misogynist desire to circumscribe Joan's agency by making her determination an object of mockery. Harper concludes that, as a '*non-traditional*' woman, Joan's 'connection with the gentry leads to self-realisation' (2000, 41). This is troubling: if Joan's union with Torquil amounts to 'self-realisation', it entails the renunciation of precisely those desires that elected her a '*non-traditional'* woman: 'I'm not safe here! I'm on the brink of losing everything I've wanted since I've wanted anything!', she exclaims. Joan's hysterical speech suggests that her selfhood and safety are reliant on precisely the gratification of desires that she is bullied by Torquil, Birdie and Catriona into relinquishing. The genius of *IKWIG*, of course, lies in its ability to sell its misogyny as an enchanting 'crusade against materialism'.

Conclusion

It is fitting to conclude with *IKWIG*'s Catriona; although she initially stands out as another '*non-traditional*' woman—she is strong, physically striking, and self-reliant—it becomes clear that unlike Alison and Joan, she needs no taming. As a married woman, Catriona poses no threat to the heteropatriarchy: like the queer-coded Colpeper, she is, in fact, its enforcer. Her introduction, 'striding with her pack of hounds across a dark tempestuous landscape', likens her to 'Diana, the goddess of hunting' (Cook 2002, 38). This deification embeds her within the mythical structure of *IKWIG*, and with it patriarchal politics. Her patronising conflation of intelligence and foolishness in the oxymoron 'intelligent female nonsense', is by no means innocent: the phrase perfectly encapsulates Powell and Pressburger's conservative portrayal of women. Invoking the pastoral via Chaucerian pilgrimages, ancient Scottish curses, and ostensibly benevolent gentry, both *A Canterbury Tale* and *IKWIG* are characterised by nostalgia for a quintessentially 'British' fairy-tale space that never really was, a conservative myth which actively disremembers Britain as 'essentially rural and essentially unchanging' (Wiener 2004, 46). Both films depict ostensibly non-traditional women whose encounters with mythic spaces and their embodied representatives disable recalcitrant femininities via marriage. Importantly, both *A Canterbury Tale* and *IKWIG* tap into a rich literary tradition which has been disempowering

shrewish women as far back as Shakespeare. Alison and Joan's transformative encounters with pastoral and its gentry are signifiers of a wider, nostalgic taming narrative reaching back to texts such as *Twelfth Night*. Much like the films themselves, male protagonists Colpeper and Torquil may be flawed misogynists, but the 'nutty thing is' we like them anyway. Women like Joan and Alison, on the other hand, may be allowed to wear the trousers (both literally and metaphorically), but only temporarily, and only if the story ends with the promise of marriage and conservative (re)gendering. Women may be intelligent, but the films will always finally dismiss their mobility, independence and determination as 'intelligent female nonsense'.

[1] Hockenhull's interpretation of the Powell-Pressburger canon within the continuity of contemporary British art is telling, as there is a strong critical desire to characterise Powell and Pressburger films as 'quintessentially English,' (Joannou 2004, 189). The 'British Cinema' label is, of course, inherently problematic, and even more so when applied to The Archers, a resolutely European creative partnership: Powell was from Kent; Pressburger was from Hungary and had worked in Germany and France; production designer Alfred Junge and cinematographer Erwin Hillier were both initially from Germany.

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