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## Intersectionality in Jane Eyre and its Adaptations

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## Intersectionality in *Jane Eyre* and Its Adaptations

Intersectionality in *Jane Eyre* and Its Adaptations

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

by

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Bachelor of Science in International Business, 2002

May 2015  
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## Abstract

During the almost 170 years since *Jane Eyre* was published, there have been numerous adaptations in many different mediums and genres, such as plays, films, musicals, graphic novels, spin-off novels, and parodies. The novel has been read in many different critical traditions: liberal humanist, historicist, feminist, and postcolonial approaches dealing with topics such as the problem of female authorship and consciousness. In addition, it has been read in terms of an ideological struggle based on race, class, and gender; xenophobia and imperialism; female labor politics; and genre issues, to just name a few. As literary critics have explored numerous themes in the text, so too have playwrights and film directors chosen specific parts of the narrative to emphasize in their productions, illustrating how concepts of intersectionality, or the study of the intersections between forms of oppression, have been used long before the term was coined in the 1980s. My thesis is devoted to the exploration of a series of adaptations of this novel since its publication. I begin by discussing the novel and the role intersectionality has played in a variety of scholarly interpretations of this work. Next, I consider three stage adaptations from the nineteenth century: John Courtney's *Jane Eyre or The Secrets of Thornfield Manor* (1848), John Brougham's *Jane Eyre* (1849), and Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer's *Jane Eyre or The Orphan of Lowood* (1870). Finally, I analyze three different film adaptations of this narrative, including movies directed by Robert Stevenson (1943), Delbert Mann (1970), and Franco Zeffirelli (1996) to provide a broad spectrum of this story as a part of film history from World War II through the end of the twentieth century. Nineteenth-century dramatists neglected the feminist plots; twentieth-century film directors chose to highlight different aspects of the romantic relationship between Jane and Rochester. I argue that the adaptations highlight the concepts of intersectionality that scholars have brought to their readings of the novel.

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## Introduction

Almost 170 years after its publication in 1847, *Jane Eyre* continues to hold readers around the world captivated by a poor young girl's coming-of-age story. When Patsy Stoneman published her work *Brontë Transformations* in 1996, Brontë's novel had been translated into twenty-four languages, and there were twenty-three different editions in the United Kingdom alone (220). It maintains the number one spot on Harvard Book Store's Top 100 fiction list of 2014 and is highly ranked on many other book lists (Harvard Book Store). It is not relegated to Victorian literature classes alone but has enjoyed popular success in numerous films, in multiple stage adaptations - both opera and drama, in art, and in countless novel adaptations, including prequels, sequels, and re-workings of the original storyline.<sup>1</sup>

Not only have the literary and entertainment industries made widespread use of Jane Eyre's culture iconography as a "common property within the culture" (Stoneman, *Brontë Transformations* xi), but there also is a proliferation of merchandise aimed at the general public: *Jane Eyre* T-shirts and mugs, baby clothing with quotations from the book, and even yard signs declaring "Team Edward Rochester" (though no "Team St. John" yard signs were for sale). The Royal Mail issued a special stamp series commemorating Paula Rego's series of *Jane Eyre* paintings and included Charlotte Brontë in a stamp series honoring famous authoresses in 1980. I agree with Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann that the abundance of *Jane Eyre* paraphernalia for sale is convincing proof of Umberto Eco's claim that "in order to transform a work into a cult object one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it irrespective of their original relationship with the whole" (qtd. in Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann 10). It is clear that the story of *Jane Eyre* has become part of Western society's cultural knowledge merely by looking at the merchandise items associated with the narrative.

Why is one novel integral to Western society so thoroughly while others are not? Harold Bloom's assertion that originality or "strangeness" is what is necessary for a work to be included in the literary canon no longer applies with a more liberated idea of a diverse canon, and *Jane Eyre* is an perfect example to illustrate a more open concept of the literary canon (5). The narrative remains a central text to Western civilization, and even the world, not because of its "aesthetic strangeness" but because the public can relate to it in numerous different ways (Schaff 26). Because of the many different issues explored in this text, including the important components in the study of intersectionality – race, gender, sexuality, disability, and class – most readers can find issues they are concerned with somewhere within the narrative. The appeal of this story can be explained by its inclusion of these aspects of intersectionality, allowing the themes to be explored in different ways by different people in different times and perpetuating the narrative for a century and a half.

With *Jane Eyre*'s appeal across the ages, each generation has found different issues of interest in the narrative. This novel has been read in the differing critical traditions of liberal humanist, historicist, feminist, postcolonial approaches dealing with topics such as the problem of female authorship and consciousness, ideological struggle based on race, class, and gender, xenophobia and imperialism, female labor politics, and genre issues (Schaff 26). Disability studies have taken a keen interest in *Jane Eyre* recently as well.<sup>ii</sup> Other scholars have been interested in the poor treatment of the lower classes and the despicable handling of charity schools as portrayed in the novel. Society's treatment of "others," including those of different races and different mental abilities, as shown in the character of Bertha Mason, has also captivated some readers. The roles of women and families in society have been reoccurring themes. Academics have focused on the importance of education for women in the novel, and the

fact that even with a decent education, there was a limited career choice for women – governess or wife being the main options available. The limited role of women in society and the feared potential for social upheaval if this changed are issues that some would argue we have yet been able to resolve in today's society.

*Jane Eyre* has captivated the public for years, and this thesis will be devoted to the exploration of a series of adaptations of this story through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with special attention to how theories of intersectionality can be applied to help understand and analyze these adaptations. After an overview of adaptation theory, I will discuss the novel, and what literary reviewers and critics of the 1850s up until today have focused on when reading this text. Next, I will consider three stage adaptations from the nineteenth century, ranging from 1848 to 1870. Finally, I will analyze three different film adaptations of this narrative, including movies released in 1943, 1970, and 1996 to provide a broad spectrum of this story as a part of film history from World War II times up until the end of the twentieth century. It will be clear that different societies and cultures in different times choose vastly dissimilar elements of the plot to focus on when producing new versions of this old and beloved story, with each adapter putting his or her own “spin” on the story.

There are some reoccurring themes explored over and over again with regard to *Jane Eyre*, but there are also some topics that have proven much less popular in the existing scholarship. The novel's feminist sympathies have not played a constant role in the adaptations of *Jane Eyre* over the last 170 years; feminist thought and application too has changed over these decades. Nineteenth-century dramatists largely neglected the feminist plots while twentieth-century film directors chose to highlight different aspects of the romantic relationship between Jane and Rochester with more or less focus on feminist tendencies. The issues related to the

study of postcolonialism, race, and disability that have been very popular to discuss in academic circles in relation to this story have very obviously been neglected and left out of these adaptations.

Just as they were quickly adapted for the stage, nineteenth-century novels, including *Jane Eyre*, were popular sources for early cinema as well, with six silent film adaptations of Brontë's novel coming out between 1910 and 1921 (Gleadell sec. 1).<sup>iii</sup> However, not every novel achieves such dramatic success, so what has caused such a large number of filmmakers to attempt to adapt this narrative so many times? Though much bigger than the scope of this project, it is interesting to very briefly discuss why there are so many literary adaptations on the big screen. Though the majority of the following research is referring to film adaptations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, most of the conclusions are applicable to the nineteenth-century stage as well. According to Brian McFarlane, novels and films share a fundamental similarity as well as a major difference, naming "narrative" as the shared characteristic and "narration" as the element that most separates the two modes of expression. By "narrative," McFarlane refers to a sequence of happenings involving a continuing group of characters, and by "narration," he means the methods by which the story is put before reader or viewer. Narrative is that which makes the two modes seem congruent, while the narration is that which marks the possibility for hostility between the two mediums (McFarlane 19). McFarlane identifies the fundamental elements of the novel he believes are most likely to be transferred to an adaptation, because they exist at the deeper levels of the story:

the events that reveal or are caused by the implication of characters or which may be more arbitrary than that suggests; the mythic resonances that a narrative may echo or set up; the psychoanalytic patterns which may be exemplified in the chain of events; or the "character functions" (villain, hero, help etc.) identified by Vladimir Propp in his study of Russian folktales. (20)

These same underlying elements present in novels also are seen in films, leading to their popularity as well. Both films and novels create worlds in which people can escape to another sphere, but normally in a more realistic manner than is found in drama or in poetry, according to MacFarlane. There is an expectation for novels and films to portray some sense of reality, “a potent sense of diegesis that keeps us aware of the minutiae of a world that is going on beyond the page or the screen’s frame” keeping the consumer’s imagination engaged in creating this world, “whether by a conceptualizing based on the words given on the page or by a conceptualizing based on the diverse *perceptual* information taken in while watching the screen and listening to the soundtrack” (McFarlane 20). There are similar expectations for novels and films in terms of them both conveying a meaningful narrative, and one that is typically with a definite sense of the “real.”

But this does not answer the question why Victorian novels in particular have been adapted on screen so frequently, for according to Elliott Kamilla, “British Victorian novels and novellas have been more frequently adapted to film than any other body of literature including Shakespearean plays” (3). There are several explanations for why nineteenth-century novels in particular have been utilized so heavily in twentieth-century entertainment, and not just Charlotte Brontë, but also her sister Emily, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Henry James, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot. Sergei Eisenstein claims that nineteenth-century authors, citing Dickens and Flaubert as examples, “prefigured cinematic techniques such as montage when they shifted back and forth, or cut, from the description of one scene to another” whereas Christian Metz argues that film continues the realist literary tradition that the novel eventually forsook (qtd. in Brosh 2). Elliott disagrees with these analyses, instead claiming that film stems more from theatrical practices than the literary tradition; however, he

does acknowledge the illustrated novel in particular as a literary form that is related to film, arguing instead that the interweaving of illustrations with narrative in illustrated novels, rather than the narrative techniques common in the nineteenth-century, foreshadows cinematic montage (96). Nevertheless, the aesthetic or formal similarities between the nineteenth-century novel and film cannot solely account for the proclivity for adaptations.

As is often the case, economic reasons also have been central in why so many nineteenth-century novels, being outside of copyright protection, have been utilized in numerous twentieth-century adaptations, with their popularity attributed to their name recognition and prominent cultural as well as educational associations. *Jane Eyre* was one of the top fifteen A Level set texts between 1951 and 1991 in the English educational system (Higson 62), which are the texts required for students to master as part of their school leaving qualification exams required in the United Kingdom as well as several other countries. Adaptations of *Jane Eyre* as well as other literary classics help boost interest in the narrative, which helps keep the novel in schools and is a financial boon to the publishing industry as well. Canonical novels published by Penguin normally sell approximately 10,000 copies a year, but in the late 1980s, this figure would double within three months if they published a spin-off edition tied into a recent movie release of the same story. Commissioning editor at Penguin noted, “even if 0.5 per cent of film-goers buy the book, that’s a lot in publishing terms” (qtd. in Higson 61). Film adaptations have also benefitted the heritage, tourism, and leisure industries in England, such as patronage to the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth as well as other historical sites associated with other novels. In 1998 the British Tourist Authority issued a special “Movie Map” showing important film locations and distributed over 250,000 of these maps to travel agencies located in North America, Australia, Europe, and the Far East (Higson 59). Simone Murray aptly points out that,

historically, name recognition for an adapted work, including the text's author, has been regarded as sufficient to ensure production financing and approval for casting for these films, though in reality the film marketing's role in the adaptation industry is much more complex and influential than commonly regarded. In fact, many different factors contribute to the success of an adaptation, including film reviews, celebrity profiles, releasing the film at the best time of year, and the carefully-chosen venues for screening (183). Due to many considerations in the cinema industry, the relationship between nineteenth-century literature and twentieth-century film adaptations, the publishing houses, the educational system, and the tourism industry has been a mutually beneficial relationship with much interconnectedness between all members.

Though the narrative qualities of both drama and novel genres can express time and place, there also are important differences between how this is accomplished, or in their "narration" if one refers back to McFarlane's definition. While it is perhaps an overgeneralization, according to McFarlane, novels customarily, though not always, are told in the past tense, whereas drama on film and on the stage is usually presumed to be happening in the present tense. A movie must use other methods of varying the timing of events, such as the flashback or by the use of special music to indicate past occurrences. Another difference in delivery between these mediums is in how they reveal the lives of their characters. In novels, it is always necessary for the reader to respond to the actual words on a page as the lives of the characters are disclosed throughout the story; in contrast, in films the viewer can utilize different tools to understand the characters' lives – movement, sound, camera angle, lengths of shots, and a variety of types of editing (McFarlane 21-23). So too with stage drama, the viewer employs a different set of skills when viewing the play compared to when he or she reads the novel, such as movement, sound, and any possible audience participation that is part of the play. There clearly

are differences between how dramatists, filmmakers, and novelists successfully convey their stories to their viewers or readers, but is it possible for us as consumers to evaluate a literary text and its adaptation(s) for their own merits?

How often have you left a movie theater after watching an adaptation of a popular book to hear many patrons murmuring, “Well, that wasn’t anything like the book” or “That was not as good as the book”? The study of adaptation is a field filled with controversy, for the ordinary play attendee or moviegoer as well as for the academic scholar, with a wide variety of ideas on the subject. Literature on screen has occupied a difficult place in academia for years – considered “too literary for film studies and too film-based for literary studies” (Cartmell and Whelehan 1). However, the controversy is not a new phenomenon but has been discussed for decades. One can go back to Plato’s disgust at the invention of writing because he feared it would obliterate the art of memory to see how suspicion often follows innovation, whether it was the fear that writing would destroy memory, photography would bring the end to painting, the car would obliterate the horse, or film would be the ruination of the book.

Critics of film originally held fast to the belief that movies extracted the life out of a literary text, as Theodore Dreiser vehemently expressed in 1932: “[Film adaptation of novels] is not so much a belittling as a debauching process, which works harm to the mind of the entire world. For the debauching of any good piece of literature, is – well, what? Criminal? Ignorant? Or both? I leave it to the reader” (211). Nonetheless, though the cinematic adaptations were often castigated as inferior to the literary text, adaptations have been a chief component of the business of film since the very beginning, such as the titles *Romeo and Juliet* and *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*, both produced in 1900. Using literature during the silent era of movies was particularly popular with makers of silent films because the public often knew the stories of

literature already and did not need the dialogue for explanation (Cartmell 2). While filmmakers and the movie-going public did not seem to have as many problems with the potential threat to the literary text, serious film aficionados and literary critics did voice many complaints and concerns. Virginia Woolf famously bemoans *Anna Karenina*'s translation to the big screen as barely recognizable in her essay "The Cinema." According to Woolf, when a film attempts to "re-create" literature, it is a disfavor not only to literature but also to film (qtd. in Cartmell 2). This anxious sentiment towards film expressed by Woolf was common among other film and literary critics of the day as well.

As the nineteenth century progressed and cinema became more and more ubiquitous, there has been an increased scholarly interest in the subject outside of mere denigration of the film adaptation as compared to the literary text. As early as 1915, poet Vachel Lindsey regards the new art of film as a vehicle to bring the spirit of poetry to the masses of America. In *The Art of the Moving Picture*, Lindsey goes as far as to see film as a link for the communication among the many scholarly disciplines in universities as well as in museums (261). Walter Benjamin's 1936 "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" argues for the categories that distinguish traditional art and literature to be done away with, instead "claiming that the 'auratic' reading and viewing formations of those classical arts must give way before the cinema's radical remakings, transformations, and adaptations" (qtd. in Corrigan 41). In 1936, scholar Allardyce Nicoll contends that films have the potential to equal theatrical texts in their artist accomplishments but must be careful not to merely copy from literature. In the first book-length study on adaptation, *Novels into Film*, published in 1957, George Bluestone continues to look at the similarities and differences between film and literature.

These scholars, as well as others throughout the twentieth century, desire to free film adaptations from the tyranny of comparison with the source text as the sole determinant of its status or success; however, there are many others, both filmmakers and writers, who nonetheless ascribe to the idea that fidelity to the literary source is the only criterion for an adaptation to be judged against. A desire to categorize adaptations based on its degree of proximity to the literary text has led to a large number of taxonomies of adaptation. To name a few, in 1977, Jack Jorgens, splits adaptations into three divisions: theatrical, realist, and filmic, while Dudley Andrew, seven years later, divides adaptations into three different categories – “borrowing” (in which the film using the reputation of the source in attempt to gain an audience), “intersection” (where the film has a clash with an inflexible text), and “transforming” (in which the film “faithfully” replicates a literary text). In 2003, Kamilla Elliot increases the number of categories to six, including the “psychic,” “international,” “ventriloquist,” “decomposing,” “genetic,” and “trumping.” In 2012, Thomas Leitch continues the categorization by naming nine specific requirements of an adaptation in his article “Adaptation and Intertextuality, or What isn’t an Adaptation, and What Does it Matter?,” including the requirement that an adaptation be exclusively intermedial, a performance, and a translation (87-104). Each of these taxonomies includes value judgments and rankings, generally determined by literary rather than filmic viewpoints (Cartmell and Whelehan 1-2). The proliferation of adaptation rankings and categories shows how the field has often attempted to privilege fidelity to the source text above other criteria.

There has been a move by many within academia to change the way in which adaptations are viewed and judged, moving away from the perspective of “not as good as the book” as the inevitable judgment of a literary adaptation on the stage or screen. An important voice in

adaptation theory is Linda Hutcheon with her well-known work on the subject, *A Theory of Adaptation*, in which she challenges “fidelity discourse” by arguing against a culture that often values the “original,” regardless of the popularity and prevalence of adaptation as a form of storytelling (xx). There are numerous definitions of what exactly an adaptation is; perhaps an amalgamation of multiple definitions is most helpful in beginning to understand the theory behind the study of adaptations. Hutcheon defines an adaptation as “a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary” (9). Complimentary to this definition, Robert Stam views film adaptations as “readings” and as part of an ongoing dialogical process, seeing adaptations in relation to art, involved in a multifaceted interchange with a variety of other texts (qtd. in Cartmell and Whelehan 3). Stam uses Gérard Genette’s concept of “hypertextuality” to help understand film adaptations, which refers to one text’s relation to its “hypotext,” or source text as others call it (Stam 4-5). It is also possible to view literary texts not as primary sources but instead as intertexts, consisting of an assortment of perspectives, which in turn frees adaptations from side-by-side analysis as compared to the literary text of the same narrative (Cartmell and Whelehan 3). In other words, intertextuality is “a relational concept that focuses not on texts *in se* but on the relations between them . . . provid[ing] an ideal theoretical basis from which can proceed an account of the shared identity of the literary source and its cinematic reflex” (Palmer 258). These more recent perspectives and definitions in the study of adaptation theory are helpful as we look at adaptations in a variety of genres.

In Hutcheon’s preface to the second edition of *A Theory of Adaptation*, published in 2013 (seven years after her original book), she celebrates the fact that the rapid growth of the field of adaptation studies since her book was first published has drastically helped reduce the tendency to view adaptations only through a fidelity discourse lens. She suggests new criteria for success

of works, such as popularity, persistence, or the diversity and extent of dissemination.<sup>iv</sup> However, at the same time as she is positive about recent developments in adaptation studies, Hutcheon also acknowledges that there are still genres of adaptations stuck in a fidelity discussion, namely adaptations in the rapidly expanding transmedia environment. She attributes this occurrence in transmedia storytelling to the industry considering adaptation a “lesser, more simplistic mode of reworking content” as well as “a related and repeated rhetoric of commoditization and commercialization that haunts adaptation discussions of franchise storytelling” (xxvi). She also sees this fidelity trend in the video game adaptation of film industry, with the reality that these games are seen as both derivative and secondary products. Though Hutcheon does not foresee a quick change in this fidelity discourse colored discussion for these two fields, she still is hopeful that the adaptational strategies in other fields will eventually permeate those genres as well (xxvi-xxvii). It is refreshing to see Hutcheon’s perspective on the change seven years of study and debate can yield in an important field of study, though her acknowledgment of further progress still needed is also important to heed.

The concepts of intertextuality developed by recent adaptation scholarship are very productive in helping answer the question I posited earlier in terms of the possibility of consumers evaluating both a literary text and its adaptation for its own merits instead of in a hierarchical relationship of novel always being judged as superior because it was produced first regardless of the quality or narrative choices of the film or play. It is important to point out that, even when using an intertextual perspective of adaptations, we do not need to, nor should we, forego all concepts of judgment and evaluation. However, I agree with Robert Stam, that our discussion will be “less moralistic [and] less implicated in unacknowledged hierarchies,” so that we will still debate successful and unsuccessful adaptations but not couched in notions of

fidelity. Instead any discussions of success will refer to “specific dialogical responses . . . in analyses which always take into account the inevitable gaps and transformations in the passage across very different media and materials of expression” (Stam 5). Brian McFarlane provides an excellent perspective on how to integrate intertextual analysis into any evaluations of adaptations:

The way we respond to any film will be in part the result of those other texts and influences we inescapably bring to bear on our viewing. We need to have in mind, for instance, the parameters of cinematic practice at the time of the film’s production, the proclivities of the film’s director and writer, the auras that attach to the film’s stars. When we turn to a film adapted from literature, or in some other way connected to a literary text or texts, we need to realize and allow for the fact that the anterior novel or play or poem is only one element of the film’s intertextuality, an element of varying importance to viewers depending on how well or little they know or care about the precursor text. (26-27)

An intertextual perspective when analyzing an adaptation will yield a much more fruitful discussion than the old fidelity debate.

The previous discussion of how to view an adaptation, including stage adaptations as well as film adaptations, using an intertextual concept of adaptation will color the remainder of this project as we progress through a discussion of intersectionality in the novel *Jane Eyre*, nineteenth-century stage adaptations, and twentieth-century film adaptations.

## Chapter 1 - Intersectionality in *Jane Eyre*

As a *bildungsroman*, the story of *Jane Eyre* follows the protagonist's journey to adulthood and her love for Rochester; however, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and race are portrayed throughout this 1847 novel as the central plot unfolds. The inclusion of such a variety of characteristics makes the theories of intersectionality particularly useful when thinking about this narrative, whether in the novel itself or its subsequent adaptations. Despite many positive responses, several nineteenth-century reviewers immediately recognized certain themes in the *Jane Eyre* novel that caused them great alarm. Some critics were worried about the possibility of political revolution due to class conflict in England as had occurred in France and were concerned with the moral Jacobinism found in the text.<sup>v</sup> In 1848 Lady Eastlake finds in *Jane Eyre*

a murmuring against God's appointment – there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man . . . [a] pervading tone of ungodly discontent . . . the tone of the mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*. (qtd. in Allott 109-110)

Though England never experienced an all-out revolution similar to that which occurred in France, there were some working class riots in England throughout the nineteenth century that helped pass the Reform Act of 1832, and the threat was still in people's minds when the novel was published in 1847. However, the majority of the criticism of the novel soon after its publication was more focused on the possibility of revolution in another area of society – in the domestic sphere.

A revolution in gender relations arguably was more feared than political or class upheaval by some in nineteenth-century English society. The Victorian novelist and critic Margaret Oliphant points out in 1885, "Here is your true revolution. France is but one of the

Western Powers; woman is the half of the world,” making it clear that her main concern was disturbance of gender relations rather than political relations (558). In 1848 in *The Quarterly Review*, Elizabeth Rigby labeled Jane as “the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit,” and from other reviews it seems that Brontë was most criticized for her “anti-Christian” refusal to accept the forms, mores, and values of society as evidenced in Jane’s anger (Gilbert and Gubar 337-338). The reviewers of the 1840s and 1850s clearly recognized the subversive elements of Brontë’s novel; however, the stage adaptations that were to immediately follow seem to ignore many of these potentially destabilizing features.

*Jane Eyre* has been explored by early feminist scholars in the twentieth century, including Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich, Elaine Showalter, and perhaps most famously by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. In *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter reads Jane as a “heroine of fulfillment” (112) and explores the conflict between passion and repression found throughout the novel, linking this to other books written in the nineteenth century but especially George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). In their groundbreaking feminist text *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar explore the doubling in *Jane Eyre*, arguing that the central confrontation of the book is Jane’s encounter with Bertha, representing her own “hunger, rebellion, and rage” (339). They also contend that Jane’s power comes from the ability to tell her own story and provides “a pattern for countless others . . . a story of enclosure and escape . . . of [the] difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome” (338-339). “[Jane’s] desires – for intimacy, recognition, sisterhood, a change in her gender and class position and in the meaning attached to such categories – resonate with every important theme in the history of feminist struggle” (Kaplan 27), which is surely why *Jane Eyre* will remain a key text for feminists to continue to explore and engage with for years to come.

There are several key instances in Brontë's novel to support a strong appeal for female emancipation. When Jane first arrives at Thornfield, Jane eloquently expresses her often-repeated feminist appeal against traditionally Victorian views of femininity and the subservience of women:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë 129)

This appeal can be seen as both a personal entreaty as well as a call of emancipation for Victorian women.

Another important appeal for female emancipation occurs when Rochester makes an allusion to a seraglio or harem as they prepare for their first (unsuccessful) attempt at marriage before the presence of an existing wife is made known publicly. Jane responds to Rochester with: "I'll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved – your harem inmates amongst the rest. I'll get admitted there and I'll stir up mutiny" (Brontë 318). By choosing to use such a strong term as *mutiny*, an offense punishable by death, Brontë brings an added political meaning to Jane's speech to Rochester. Jane clearly has no intentions of being kept as a plaything by anyone, not even Rochester, and thus Brontë depicts Jane as a rebel girl struggling for female emancipation not only for herself but also for other Victorian women.

Despite Jane superficially fitting into the conventional formula for the domestic novel of the era, her internal dialogue provides a feminist critique integrated into the conventional plot. Through her internal dialogue of thoughts expressed, the reader understands that Jane's inability to thrive in the Reeds' home is not only because of their cruelty but also because she is not pretty

and does not neatly fit into the role of the delightful young girl she is expected to fill. Similarly, even though she is intelligent and energetic, Jane must work as a governess because no other employment is available to her. Jane's internal dialogue about these grievances, more than a speech given on a soapbox or a strongly worded appeal in a feminist pamphlet, gave women readers "implicit permission to be discontented, to question, and to imagine alternatives" (Cohen 16). Jane's internal dialogue opened up this feminist critique to a larger audience in the Victorian age.

Nevertheless, *Jane Eyre* is not clearly and conclusively a feminist text, with the perspective that the narrative is not very forward-thinking in this regard especially prevalent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Critics have problematized *Jane Eyre*'s position of privilege in the feminist canon – at least with the more traditional reading of the novel as a plight of a young woman finding her way in a patriarchal world despite all the odds. The somewhat simplistic feminist reading of *Jane Eyre* from a white, middle class, heterosexual perspective, as some critics claimed Gilbert and Gubar provided in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, has been expanded by critical scholarship coming from a variety of fields, thus challenging the reading of *Jane Eyre* as a story of "Everywoman" (Gilbert and Gubar 80). Some of the concerns include the problematic ending of the novel, the treatment of the other women in the narrative, and the violation of gender norms resulting in disastrous consequences in the novel.

Rochester and Jane's marriage at the end of the novel is one of the most contentiously debated "happy endings" in literature.<sup>vi</sup> Despite the desire for independence and self-sufficiency that Jane repeats throughout the novel, the novel still ends with her in a traditional, domestic role as prescribed by mainstream Christianity of nineteenth-century England, confirming the "lingering possibility of a patriarchal force that no amount of renunciation can surmount," thus

troubling a feminist reading of this novel (LaMonaca 259). In addition, Maria LaMonaca points out that “Jane’s closing tribute to the rigid, patriarchal, and gloomy St. John presents a particular challenge to readings of the novel as a feminist *bildungsroman*” (245). Perhaps the Brontë family’s Anglicanism influenced the author, so that in the end, Charlotte Brontë felt the need to frame desire and determination within the constraints of Victorian domesticity (LaMonaca 259). Therefore, despite some feminist inclinations expressed, the ending of the novel can be seen as evidence that Brontë finally could not rise above certain religious constraints of the time and of her family.

The formulaic marriage ending that Brontë uses to conclude her novel is contentious on its own, but another problematic issue is the so-called “castration” of Rochester. He is crippled and blinded in the fire that destroys Thornfield, but his disabilities do not bother Jane; in fact, she appears to prefer him with his disabilities, for she tells him, “I love you better now when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence” (Brontë 527). She continues by saying that she prefers her lover more as a “sightless Samson,” a “Vulcan,” or a “royal eagle, chained to a perch” so that he must “entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor” (510, 523, 526). Her power is increased seemingly only because his is decreased. Her gothic hero has to be tamed, and wounded, blind, lacking a hand, and needing to lean heavily on the arm of his beloved before they are reunited. Rochester can be seen as the quintessence of the masculine victim because he is “daddy wounded . . . the safe husband . . . the punished patriarch . . . the weakened man that the gothic feminist must have if she is to live with a man at all” (Hoeverler 204). If a diminished and punished husband is necessary to symbolically level the playing field in a marriage, what does this imply about the worth of woman and man in this twisted economy of relationships?

*Jane Eyre* can be read as one of the last female gothic novels. A central argument of Diane Hoeveler's book *Gothic Feminism* is that the female writers of gothic novels, including Jane Eyre, Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen, among others, "construct[ed] a series of ideologies – a set of literary masquerades and poses – that would allow their female characters and by extension their female readers a fictitious mastery over what they considered an oppressive social and political system" through what she calls "professional femininity" (xii). She sees the female gothic novel as "a coded and veiled critique of all those public institutions that have been erected to displace, contain, or commodify women" (xiii). As *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Villette* all fall at the end of the female gothic time period, Hoeveler sees these three Brontë novels "as an indictment of the limitations of gothic feminism in their examination of various gothic feminist strategies – rejection of motherhood, control of the patriarchal estate, struggle with tyrannous religious forces, overthrow of the suffocating and claustrophobic nuclear family, and the celebration of education for women – and each novel concludes on a compromised note" (186). The compromise at the end of *Jane Eyre* can be read as showing the failure of gothic feminism as a movement, with the novel serving as a representative for the genre as a whole.

Though clear declarations for female emancipation by Jane can be seen throughout the novel, conversely there are equally valid examples of Jane's commitment to female emancipation being put to the test. Avril provides a critique of a feminist reading of *Jane Eyre* by focusing on Jane's disregard for the rights of Adèle and Bertha because Jane does not connect the idea of women's emancipation to any community-based model. Because Jane is unconcerned with Rochester's treatment of Adèle as a mere object, she "fails to see . . . the oppression and objectification of women, indeed the whole infantilization of their sex [that] begins in childhood"

(137-138). Similarly, Jane's lack of concern for Bertha, as a wife locked in the attic because she has a mental illness, is another example of Jane's awareness of gender issues as inconsistent and flawed.

A narrow definition of the gender binary further inhibits a supposed feminism in the story. Nancy Armstrong's article "Gender Must Be Defended" provides analysis of *Jane Eyre* in light of Foucault's ideas on "biopower," again troubling a perceived feminism in the novel (531). She posits that "this novel persuaded a readership that human beings who violated gender norms put at risk both the household and the individuality it protected" because "[l]ife outside the gender binary is understood as a negation of the feminine" which excludes anyone imagined as beyond society's disciplinary reach as barred from the entitlements and safeguards of liberal society, which explains why so many women (all outside the gender binary) die in this novel (536, 544). Bertha, Jane's nemesis, personifies this concept of negative femininity. The idea that only those who follow a strict definition of femininity are allowed to survive in the narrative is problematic for a feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*.

### *Sexuality: Is This Allowed in Nineteenth Century Novels?*

*Jane Eyre* not only addresses new ways of understand gender roles but also explores alternative narratives of sexual relationships. Granted, what is considered "alternative" in the twenty-first century is drastically different from mid-1850s Victorian England, but certainly literary critics in that time period immediately took issue with the "furious lovemaking" described in *Jane Eyre*. Critic Mrs. Oliphant identifies "the most alarming revolution of modern times [that] . . . followed the invasion of *Jane Eyre*" as the change in how the typical romantic relationship was portrayed in novels. Oliphant explains, "Ten years ago we professed an

orthodox system of novel-making. Our lovers were humble and devoted” whereas she contrasts this with the “furious lovemaking” of Brontë’s novel as “a wild declaration of the ‘Right of Woman’ in a new aspect” (qtd. in Gilbert 354). For Oliphant, the fact that Jane was sexually attracted to Rochester, “with [her] veins running fire, and [her] heart beating faster than [she could] count its throbs” (Brontë 376), and *not afraid* to acknowledge the extreme attraction, was disrupting the natural order of courtship and romantic relationships.

Though a twenty-first-century reader might not view *Jane Eyre* as very sexually explicit, one must look at the book through a Victorian lens. John Maynard argues that Charlotte Brontë offers “the fullest and most sophisticated discussion of sexual issues of any major Victorian writer before Hardy” (viii), focusing especially on her depiction of the awakening to adult sexuality as seen not only in *Jane Eyre* but also in *The Professor*. He reasons that Brontë’s inclusion of the strength of sexual forces in her character’s lives and the stresses and difficulties from that strength was unusual at the time and therefore important (93). Maynard even argues that Brontë’s frank depictions of sexual desire prefigure many of the major assumptions of the sexual revolution in the twentieth century (viii). Exploring Jane’s transition and awakening to adult sexuality is central to the text as well as interesting to consider in relation to new psychological developments in sexuality that were soon to follow from Havelock Ellis and Freud.

Jane is not the only woman whose sexuality is shown in *Jane Eyre* though; Bertha is another woman whose sexuality is portrayed, though her character is very different from the governess’s. According to Maynard, Bertha was created out of Brontë’s and her culture’s fear of excessive sexuality in women, illustrating the Victorian belief of a correlation between sexual excess and the suppressive forces it can evoke (106-107). In addition, Bertha’s sexuality is

interwoven with exoticism and racism, so she is not only an excessively sexual woman but also an over-sexualized Other in the narrative based on her ties to colonial Jamaica and her dark skin color. Rochester only learns of Bertha's excessive sensuality after their marriage; he describes her "giant propensities" to Jane as "the most gross, impure, depraved" he ever had seen (Brontë 364). After Bertha is punished for her sins with madness, her language further reveals her depravity, for her mad curses are described as "such language! – no professed harlot ever had a fouler vocabulary than she" (Brontë 365). Therefore, Bertha functions as a warning of excessive sexuality whereas Jane is shown as progressing in a "normal," moderate manner.

An attractive physical appearance is of course an attribute often associated with desire and sexuality; however, neither Jane nor Rochester is eye-catching. Jane's plain appearance is emphasized from the very beginning of the narrative, with the maid Abbot remarking that "one really cannot care for such a little toad as that" (Brontë 31). The repeated notice of Jane's lack of beauty prevents the reader from objectifying Jane aesthetically or sexually (Mitchell 46). Similarly, Rochester's appearance is remarked upon throughout the novel, with his unattractiveness mentioned several times by Jane, for "had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, [Jane] should not have dared to stand thus questioning him" when she first met him (Brontë 134). A lack of physical beauty does not translate into a lack of attraction though, and Jane is nonetheless very attentive to Rochester's physical appearance at the same time as she makes it clear that he is not good-looking. Throughout the book, "Jane's gaze turns voraciously, even at times, voyeuristically, toward Rochester, as she catalogs his body parts and properties in what amounts to a series of female-authored *blazons*" (Gilbert 3645). She gives close scrutiny to his "broad and jetty eyebrows, his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair . . . his decisive nose . . . his full nostrils, denoting . . . cholera; his grim mouth, chin,

and jaw” (Brontë 142). Jane’s keen interest in Rochester’s physicality makes it clear that desire is possible without an attractive appearance, just as Rochester also is attracted to Jane despite her plain appearance.

Though some aspects of Jane’s sexual journey from a girl to a woman can be construed as strong and forthcoming, nevertheless, it can also be argued that Jane’s sexuality is exceedingly predictable as she decides to marry her lover in a typical heterosexual union at the end of the novel. In addition, earlier in the book, she firmly rejects Rochester’s offer of being his mistress and thereby conforms to the commonly held beliefs that bigamy and extramarital affairs are immoral. It is clear from the text that Jane does have sexual desires, which may have been scandalous in the Victorian era (at least in public), but there also are clear cases in *Jane Eyre* of normative portrayals of sexuality as well.

There are, however, a multitude of sexual relationships explored in *Jane Eyre*, not only for the women in the novel but also for the men. Similar to Blanche Ingram in relation to her mother, Rochester’s sexuality is also commoditized on the marriage market by his father, so he can be “provided for by a wealth marriage” that also would be beneficial to his relatives (Brontë 362). When his marriage to Bertha is unsuccessful, he becomes promiscuous and takes multiples lovers in France, but neither marriage nor promiscuity fulfill Rochester ultimately. Interestingly, Rochester is not only depicted as sexually active but also as emotionally needy. He is not shown as a callous rake but instead as weak and vulnerable, presenting male sexuality in a more nuanced and multi-faceted portrayal than the typical Byronic hero who was sexually dominant. St. John Rivers has a very different take on sexuality, renouncing desire altogether in the name of religion, causing great pain to himself. He acknowledges love for Rosamond Oliver but derides this ecstasy as “a mere fever of the flesh,” disproportionate with the “convulsion of the soul”

(Brontë 444). *Jane Eyre* does not only investigate a variety of female sexual expressions but also a variety of male sexualities, with it apparent that neither gender is free from problems in this area in Victorian society.

*Class: What's a Governess To Do?*

In addition to a multitude of expressions of a variety of genders and sexual relationships, class is another issue explored throughout *Jane Eyre*. The narrative is full of class issues: a poor orphan (Jane) is abandoned by her middle-class family (the Reeds) to the care of an orphanage and eventually seeks employment with a rich gentleman (Rochester) who is being pursued by a money-hungry upper-class woman (Blanche Ingram). Jane's employment as a governess is central to the narrative and also was an important topic discussed in Victorian society.

There were very few jobs open to middle-class women who worked in the mid-1800s, with governess or teacher one of the few professions available. Earlier, in the 1790s, middle-class women in England had more options, including working as plumbers, butchers, jailors, farmers, seedmen, tailors, and saddlers, but by the 1840s and 1850s the most common jobs were dressmaking, millinery, and teaching (Poovey 127). *Jane Eyre* was not the only novel that explored this phenomenon of an increase of governesses, as other professions were considered inappropriate for women, with the governess a familiar figure in midcentury middle-class Victorian novels. In addition, the plight of governesses was a popular subject for periodical essayists as well (Poovey 126). Though governesses were plentiful, their position in society was often shaky.

Governesses by the mid-1800s found themselves in a precarious position, caught between economic pressures and social criticism. Mary Poovey explains the importance of the governess

in her ideological work of gender because of the governess's proximity to two of the most important Victorian representations of woman:

the figure who epitomized the domestic ideal, and the figure who threatened to destroy it. Because the governess was like the middle-class mother in the work she performed, but like both a working-class woman and men in the wages she received, the very figure who theoretically should have defended the naturalness of separate spheres threatened to collapse the difference between them. (127)

There was social anxiety about the role of the governess because she was a middle-class woman in a time period when social stability was believed to be integrally connected to women as they were the protectors of morality in the home, and by staying at home, they allowed the middle-class men to earn a wage to support their families.

Another source of social anxiety related to governesses was the possibility that the governess brought working-class habits to infiltrate the middle-class home, eroding the morality heralded there. Being unmarried, the governess occupied a precarious position in the home – a place of emotional and sexual danger. Because of her close proximity to a married man, she was viewed as a danger to him, by providing sexual temptation, though the governess also needed to worry about her sexual susceptibility in the home (Poovey 128-129). Jane's precarious position as governess was not an isolated incident in *Jane Eyre*, but instead a commonly discussed problem/reality in England in the mid-1800s.

In the mid-nineteenth century, marriage was an important financial decision that was heavily influenced by class. The Reeds constantly remind Jane that she is poor because of her parents' socially and economically reckless marriage, with John Reed informing her at a young age that "you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense" (Brontë 13). Jane is keenly interested in marital

economic equality when she reaches an older age after so much humiliation suffered as a child.

This economic concern leads her to misconstrue Rochester's relationship with Blanche and herself:

[The] longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles: I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them, such as I could not fathom. (Brontë 221)

Clearly she is very conscious of how class can affect relationships, even if she does not understand all the ins and outs of relationships at this point. Just as Miss Ingram is restrained by her class, so too is Jane marked by her lower class in life.

As a reaction to her parents' tragic marriage, when she first falls in love with Rochester, Jane understandably attempts to have the best of both worlds in her relationship with Rochester – alleviation from the pain she suffered as a penniless orphan, with emotional fulfillment coming from the romantic relationship, and economic fulfillment coming from his stable economic position in the world (Dupras 397). However, this is inevitably unsuccessful because no relationship ensures complete romantic and economic fulfillment, even if the partner is unencumbered with a wife hidden in his attic. Jane continues to wrestle with class implications when she inherits the large sum of money from her long-lost uncle, with her new financial status one of the first things she is sure to tell Rochester when she comes back to him after leaving St. John Rivers. There are class implications in Jane's marriage to Rochester as well.

The famous first sentence of *Jane Eyre's* last chapter, "Reader, I married him" (Brontë 532), can be interpreted as less than an enthusiastic marriage announcement by the narrator Jane, with its "terse and punctilious" word choice (Dupras 404). Getting married, with all the economic implications, clearly is not a simple event for Jane. Likewise, Charlotte Brontë

experienced similar anxieties when she eventually married later in her life, as described by Brontë to Ellen Nussey in a letter: “it is a solemn and strange and perilous thing for a woman to become a wife” (qtd. in Moglen 235). Ending in a conventional marriage that seems inevitable but not necessarily highly celebrated, according to Moglen, could point towards the fact that “Brontë had neither the self-confidence nor the militance to leave behind the conventional patterns of her world” (227) when relating to marriage, an institution in which it is difficult to escape from the deep-seated implications of class and economic often imposed on society.

Class can be read as an important key to the novel’s handlings of sexual identities. Class and gender are linked in *Jane Eyre* because “gendered performances become acts that are increasingly tied to material wealth, and the text suggests that only the middle and upper classes can afford the costly performance of gender” (Godfrey 856). Godfrey sees Jane’s progression from her station as teacher at Lowood to private governess as a signifier of a key aspect in the novel’s subversion of gender, “since governesses served as a hole in the invisible wall between working-class and middle-class gender identities” (857). Jane’s lower age and class as compared to Rochester at least superficially reaffirms her subservient position to him. Though in some ways the text sanctions a male-dominated Victorian gender system, in other ways those norms are fundamentally destabilized through the novel’s portrayals of class and age (Godfrey 865, 869). Class was a critical aspect of identity that Brontë utilized to explore sexual identities.

### *Race and Disabilities: Black, Crazy, Blind, or All of the Above*

Not only are class relations a complex and complicated picture in Brontë’s novel, the treatment of race in this narrative has sparked controversy as well. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s famous article “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” provides a critique of *Jane*

*Eyre* from a postcolonial perspective in 1985, arguing that Bertha had been cast as the cultural and racial Other within feminist criticism (675). Spivak also contends that “Bertha’s function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law” (680). Though Bertha’s race is never specified in the novel, Spivak identifies several troubling implications of her portrayal in *Jane Eyre* in relation to racial and colonial stereotypes commonly held in mid-1850s England. Susan Myer responds to Spivak’s article five years later with an alternative postcolonial reading of the novel, instead categorizing racial otherness as a signifier of all oppressed people (including women) in the novel. Though I agree with Lori Pollock’s critique of both these articles that “Brontë’s representation of Bertha Mason generates a multitude of slippages and transgressions in the text which have been largely ignored in the existing scholarship on *Jane Eyre*” (270), Spivak and Myer were pivotal in beginning the conversation about how racial and colonial issues were portrayed in Brontë’s novel, a conversation that is still being worked out in academia today.

Jane’s continued use of the term “Master” throughout the narrative when addressing Rochester is deeply problematic not only because it points to a submissive sexism in *Jane Eyre* but also an imperialist world view which is integrally linked to racist views of the mid-1800s.

Jina Politi states,

The political ideology behind the transformations of this term [Master] will be that people, i.e. races, nations, classes and women are happy in inequality and have no reason to revolt against the domination/subordination structure of their social existence so long as they are free to *choose* their masters and so long as this freedom of choice hides its exploitative purposes behind the humanitarian guise. (58-59)

Jane’s use of the word “Master” can be seen as troubling when applied to gender equality but also to racial equality.

Not only are there potential issues related to the portrayal of race in *Jane Eyre*, but the portrayal of disabilities in Brontë's novel is a relatively new topic of discussion, with academic articles related to this topic proliferating in the last 10-15 years. Academics in disability studies have recently brought awareness to the problematic implications of linking madness and rebellion as has often been done within feminist literary criticism, such as Bertha's case of madness in *Jane Eyre*. Rochester's case of blindness is also problematic, as it can equate disability with punishment. Bolt acknowledges the fact that *Jane Eyre* has come to be considered one of the key examples of a woman overcoming patriarchal control but points out that "male and female roles may well be inverted in the novel, but the underpinning hierarchies of normativism over disability and 'the sighted' over 'the blind' remain intact" (35). A feminist disability studies' reading of the novel, on the contrary, emphasizes "the connections between madness and physiognomy, between the mind and body," providing us with a different way of thinking about mental and physical disability in *Jane Eyre* (Donaldson 102). These troubling portrayals of disability as the same thing as rebellion and punishment cause some scholars to trace current prejudices against people with disabilities to older misconceptions about disabilities, such as those some see in *Jane Eyre*.

### *Intersectionality: Sorting Through the Confusion*

By considering *Jane Eyre*'s feminism or lack thereof, its multiple portrayals of possibly "furious lovemaking," its analysis of class, its inclusion or exclusion of racial stereotypes, and its potentially disturbing inclusion of typecasts relating to disabilities, it is apparent that this novel provides a complicated landscape for each of these topics. Though many scholars attempt to argue for their perspective from the text, whether it is or is not a feminist text for example, I

would argue that what is more important is that there are portrayals of all these various categories which present a multi-faceted perspective for the readers. Even though there are potentially disturbing portrayals of gender, sexuality, class, race, and disability in the novel, as many scholars have argued, I contend that what makes it important is that Brontë included such a large number of these identities, even if we do not always approve of how they were portrayed. It could be said that by including so many different facets of differences in her characters, from gender, sexuality, class, race, and disability, Brontë was ahead of her time, using concepts of intersectionality before it was a popular theory in the late twentieth-century.

Theories of intersectionality have greatly influenced feminist theory and its implications over the last several decades, and these concepts also can influence how people view the narrative of *Jane Eyre*. Though some feminists go back to 1892 to link Anna Julia Cooper with intersectional thinking, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the word *intersectionality* in 1989 and greatly influenced its application in contemporary feminist and critical race theory (Garry 844). Susan Alice Fischer elaborates on the history of the discourses associated with intersectionality, which is helpful to consider here, not only as a foundation in understanding the concept, but also because feminist criticism of *Jane Eyre* followed a very similar course. By the 1980s and 1990s, there was acknowledgement by those who categorized themselves as feminists that “second-wave feminism” had failed to consider the intricacies of women’s identities and experiences, especially in the fallacy of assuming that all women’s experiences were the same as the predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual, Protestant, able-bodied women whose perspectives lead the “first-wave” movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Women with different experiences spoke out their objections that they not only had to struggle against misogyny, along with all other women, but also against homophobia, classism, racism, and other types of

oppression, and therefore gender inequality looked very differently for these women depending on their position in society while including all aspects of identity (Fischer 176). The reality of non-hierarchical oppression and the need to oppose it in all its forms is illustrated by Audre Lorde in her 1984 essay “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” in which she defines herself as “a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple” (854). Though never using the term *intersectionality*, her essay nevertheless focuses on the reality that different contexts are shaped by the complexities of multiple social locations, and her outlook helped the theoretical perspective of intersectionality (Fischer 176). Intersectionality remains helpful in expanding the discussion of inequality.

The idea, though not always the specific term, of intersectionality has been key not only in literary feminist thought but also in a range of disciplines in an attempt to leave a gender-dominant feminism and to move closer to what Andersen and Hill Collins categorizes as “interlocking categories of experience [which] emerged out of a growing recognition that it is not possible to separate out the categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality, nor to explain inequalities through a single framework” (Valentine 12). Fischer explains that “intersectionality keeps a focus on multidimensional relations of power that can otherwise get lost with a focus on only one aspect of identity, such as gender or race” (177). While Fischer uses intersectionality to look at contemporary women’s fiction written in the last twenty years, her analysis using metaphor to explain intersectionality in these texts can help with much older fiction as well. She uses Cynthia Ozick’s case for the renewing power of a literature that nurtures connection because it focuses on ethical and political dimensions in life. Ozick writes:

Through metaphor, the past has the capacity to imagine us, and we it. Through metaphorical concentration, doctors can imagine what it is to be their patients. Those who

have no pain can imagine those who suffer. Those at the center can imagine what it is to be outside. The strong can imagine what it is to be weak. Illuminated lives can imagine the dark. Poets in their twilight can imagine the borders of stellar fire. We strangers can imagine the familiar hearts of strangers. (328-329)

This empathy that Ozick describes is clearly present in Brontë's novel. If metaphor is "the primary figure of speech which represents this connection" of women making connections with other women, as Fischer argues (177), then a book written by a woman whose protagonist is a woman seeking her fortune in an inhospitable world of early 1800s England, as is true in *Jane Eyre*, can be seen as part of this group of fiction. Brontë utilizes multiple metaphors of literature, in terms of narrative, character, etc., to draw correlations between disparate groups of people, not only women but certainly including many women readers.

The metaphor of literature provides women authors an opportunity to express their sentiments on a variety of identities. As Fischer says,

As feminism attempts to alter relations of power in society and as women writers articulate this desire through metaphors of connection, they are able to engage fully the dialectic – that is the social, political and transformative – nature of language. Metaphor – bearing across – not only enables them to "find their voices" but to imagine an ear – an interlocutor – receptive to their metaphors of shifting paradigms. (178-179)

In other words, "The great novels transform experience into idea because it is the way of metaphor to transform memory into a principle of continuity. By 'continuity' I mean nothing less than literary seriousness which is unquestionably a branch of life-seriousness" (Ozick 328). I would contend that Brontë has done just that, "transform experience into idea," by providing a gripping story of a girl who is lost in the world, seeking her individual path in an often inhospitable environment, resulting in a connection for other people in other times who find themselves in similar or even dissimilar situations using her narrative as a guide and comfort in difficult or confusing times. Regardless of whether Brontë's narrative always responds in a politically-correct manner according to twenty-first century ethics, Jane's story buoys readers,

and part of that buoying effect is because of the disparate elements Brontë includes in her novel – a range of gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability.

Though Brontë had never heard of the term, her classic text is a prime example that can be analyzed according to the concepts of intersectionality as it contains various categories of gender, sexuality, class, race, and disability, and it is clear that these complex identities “do not act independently of each other in [the character’s] individual lives or in [their] social structure . . . [but instead are] shaped by and work through others” (Garry 827). In Jane, we see a white, lower-class female orphan who is attempting to better her social position by working as a governess, one of the very few professions open to women of that time. Arguably, she expresses her own sexuality and attraction to Rochester in ways that were uncharacteristic of literature of the mid-1800s. Bertha is another female character in the story, though of a possibly different racial background as she came from Jamaica, but her race is unclear. It is known that Bertha is upper-class, similar to Blanche Ingram, though these two female characters fare far differently despite their wealth. So too does Bertha have a disability, the mental disability of insanity, and her husband Rochester eventually receives a disability as well, the physical disability of blindness and a hand he can no longer use, in the fire when he attempts to save Bertha. However, again, Bertha and Rochester fare decidedly differently despite the fact that they both have disabilities.

It is fruitful to see how intersectional theory can be used to look at *Jane Eyre* in a new perspective as Ann Garry illustrates in her article “Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender.” Garry shows how it is possible to move away from a conversation of whether *Jane Eyre* is or is not a feminist text, or whether it is or it is not a racist text, instead the novel can be viewed as portraying numerous women with a variety of identities, some that

coincide and others that do not. Though she builds on María Lugone's ideas, Garry disagrees with Lugone that colonized women, women on the "dark side" (such as Bertha) and colonizer women, women on the "light side" (such as Jane) need to be categorized as different genders but instead argues for coupling intersectionality with family resemblance analysis because intersecting oppressions impact each other but are not necessarily joined (Garry 836). Thus both Jane and Bertha can be categorized as women, but their differences in terms of race and class are part of the family resemblance analysis of women as a whole.

Literary critics of the 1850s recognized the controversial topics contained in the source text, and recent scholars have expanded their analysis of Brontë's novel outside of a more straightforward analysis of only looking at individual, isolated aspects of the narrative. Literary criticism of *Jane Eyre*, and other texts as well, in fact, can be viewed as a type of adaptation. *Jane Eyre* has been situated in the feminist canon for many years, but feminist scholars have adapted their interpretations of this text multiple times to include, and exclude, certain aspects which work better for their perspective and point of view than other parts of the narrative.

It is interesting to note that literary critics of the 1850s saw controversial topics of patriarchal and class oppression in *Jane Eyre*, and more recent literary academics have been exploring even more areas of potential domination and oppression related to race, colonization, and disability studies found in the original novel since its publication almost 170 years ago. However, the adaptations leave many of these issues unexplored. One might expect that a progression of time would bring more of these issues into a place of prominence in the adaptations of *Jane Eyre* to reflect scholarship written on the source text, but that does not seem to be the case. Granted, the feminist tendencies obviously present in the source text, largely ignored by the nineteenth-century adapters, have been recuperated by later twentieth-century

filmmakers. Nevertheless, the complications of the story made clear by postcolonial, racial, and disability studies have been systematically ignored in the adaptations I chose to analyze for this paper. There was definite awareness of some of these issues present in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and also a British musical stage production of *Jane Eyre* (1997-1999), but these seem to be exceptions rather than the rule in terms of adaptation trends with regards to this narrative.

Though not the only literary adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is one of the most well known appropriations, published in 1966 by Jean Rhys. Rhys's novel gives Antoinette Mason, renamed Bertha by Rochester, a complex history and a voice. Though Bertha is marginalized socially and spatially in *Jane Eyre*, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the reader is provided a glimpse of what her life might have looked like back in the Caribbean. Her story is recuperated by means of first person narration with interleaves of additional voices including Rochester. Rhys not only explores mental illness and the female perspective in her text but also exposes the racism rooted in the British imperial age and the literature it produced. Patricia Waugh argues that by providing a marginal character from a canonical work of English literature with a backstory, Rhys "prophetically and proleptically . . . caught what would come to be the dominant literary concerns of the next twenty-five years: the feminist theme of the suppressed 'madwoman in the attic'; the structuralist rediscovery of 'intertextuality'" (203), an example of postmodernism's repeated attentiveness in giving the silenced characters of the canon a voice.

The reclaimed postcolonial perspective of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea* has influenced many readers and viewers of *Jane Eyre*, so the two narratives are linked even though *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published more than a hundred years after *Jane Eyre*. Julie Sanders makes the successful comparison that "[i]n the same way that it might be said that Charlotte Brontë's 1847

novel *Jane Eyre* cannot now be read from a twenty-first century perspective without the informing insights of postcolonialism or feminism, then perhaps *Jane Eyre* is also read differently in the light of Jean Rhys's hugely influential appropriation, *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (98). I agree that few contemporary readers would read *Jane Eyre* without awareness of the feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern significance of the relegated character of the ‘madwoman in the attic,’ and likely also would possess a knowledge of Rhys's appropriation. The web of intertextuality discussed earlier is particularly helpful in discussing this appropriation of *Jane Eyre*'s character in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as an “easy linear structure of straightforward readings of ‘influence’ that seem to presume a greater value in whatever comes first” is not always possible or profitable from an intertextual perspective (Sanders 158-159). Literary adaptations as well as stage and film adaptations contribute to the cultural knowledge surrounding *Jane Eyre*, not subtracting from the value of the novel but adding to it.

## Chapter 2 - Nineteenth-Century Stage Adaptations: Jane the Governess Encounters Melodrama

Novels were widespread forms of entertainment in the nineteenth century and were released in suspense-enhancing serial magazines and multiple-volume installments to ensure readers stayed engaged with the storyline, similar to how television dramas of today are released. However, after these novels were published, many nineteenth-century novels also had lives beyond the written page, including on the stage, with Dickens even occasionally adapting his own work for the stage (Brosh 1). The first theatrical adaptation of *Jane Eyre* was on the stage in London within three months of the novel's publication, and seven more plays were performed on the English or American stage between 1848 and 1882 (Stoneman, "Inside Out" 147). Clearly, the sensational elements of the story had potential appeal to a non-reading audience as well.

It was common for novels to provide plots for drama, as in the case of *Jane Eyre*, but because the "portrayal of internal reality was still the province of fiction" (Cross 15), it was not surprising that "the conventions of stage melodrama turn[ed] Jane's story 'inside out,' translating it from inward analysis to soliloquy and dialogue, from a private 'autobiography' shared with the discerning reader to a public declaration of grievance delivered in a voice, as Dickens put it, 'audible half a mile off'" (Stoneman, "Inside Out" 147). It might be assumed that these eight stage productions would contain similar themes, but instead it is interesting to note that each focuses on a different thematic source within melodrama – ranging from the plight of the lower classes to the difficulties of widows and orphans, from the destiny of the fallen woman to the fate of the "reformed rake" as the dramatists respond to different audiences and to ongoing ideological issues in English society ("Inside Out" 147-148). The strength of the feminist message was reduced in these early dramatic adaptations compared to the original novel and instead there is a focus on other social issues that were less controversial. The demands of the

audience obviously influenced the content of these plays, but the long-lasting effects of the Licensing Act of 1737 also impacted the playwrights' choices of what to include in their productions. The Lord Chamberlain's "Examiner of Plays" could require changes to a drama – or ban the play entirely. John Larpent and George Colman were the examiners in the early nineteenth century, closely preceding the first *Jane Eyre* play, and both were known as some of the most conservative regulators (Cross 27). Thus playwrights quickly realized the necessity of writing dramas that would not raise any red flags with the regulatory authorities.

### *Theater vs. Literature in the Nineteenth Century: War or a Symbiotic Relationship?*

For much of the twentieth century, nineteenth-century melodrama was a neglected field of study, suffering from low expectations and unacknowledged biases of its detractors, resulting in little literary criticism of that genre until later in the twentieth century. For years there was an exaggerated separation between the theater and the literature of the nineteenth century in academic discussions; however, scholars recently have been investigating the kinship between nineteenth-century theater and the novel rather than emphasizing their differences and privileging literature over theater.

The relationship between novels and popular theater in the nineteenth century was often tenuous, with the two genres having nothing and everything in common. They both were mass-cultural entertainment dependent on consumers having enough time and money to partake in their product, but they had very different reputations in Victorian Britain. Emily Allen argues that the figure of theater was used to define the novelistic sphere, both supporting the novel's claims of distinction at the same time as thwarting the novel. The theater was useful as novelists were spending much of the nineteenth century trying to distance themselves from links with

amorous fiction and scandal writing in order to cement their association with the prosperous and respectable middle classes; however, “with its spectacular bodies on stage and tradition of embodied viewing, theater reminds the novel of the very materiality it would like to forget,” therefore “theater provided the novel with an unstable opposite that served both to repel and attract” (Allen 7). The financial motivation propelled both novelists and dramatists in an attempt to succeed in a discerning consumer market, even if novelists tried to distance their work from the reality of the value of money, nonetheless it was just as relevant to them as it was to dramatists.

Scholarly opinion of nineteenth-century drama has largely been formed through a literary framework. Much of the scholarly writing in the twentieth century has imagined theater as

a phenomenon, in the nineteenth century, only nominally literary but overwhelmingly vocal, gestural, spectacular – to be synonymous with “drama,” and has sought in it the narrative structures which underlie realist fiction, reading its relationships to the social and literary worlds as one reads novels, chronologically, sequentially; relying on literary interpretive strategies, on the existence of the signifying properties typically found in written text. (Vlock 5)

However, Deborah Vlock posits that Victorians did not view theater, literature, or their social world in a linear, chronological sequence, but instead “in terms of very explicit non-narrative signs (voices, postures) as well as the stories which tied those signs into narrative units” (5). A chief aim in her book *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre* is to question the previously unexamined belief in the interiority of Victorian culture, specifically “the very public nature of the Victorian hegemony” (Vlock 2). Vlock argues for an expanded view of the Victorian novel and drama, using the term “imaginary text” to mean “a ‘reading space’ located outside of the actual narrative embodiments of Victorian novels, and inside the field of sociodramatic possibilities – of idioms and gestures and a whole range of signifiers – established by popular entertainments” (6). This perspective is helpful in situating *Jane Eyre* in a culture in

which literature and theater often could not be distinguished as two distinct categories as some think of them to be but instead the novel and drama were conversant with each other in the process and reception of both forms of entertainment.

Victorian readings were mediated by the culture of theater not only because reading often took a public form in the nineteenth century, but also because authors often used the body of sociodramatic possibilities established in the theater in their own work. Vlock acknowledges that Brontë had more interest in interiority and in psychological and emotional struggles, resulting in less explicitly theatrical content found in her novels as compared to Dickens's novels (9, 21).<sup>vii</sup> Nonetheless, there is still evidence in *Jane Eyre* of the theater impacting novel writing just as novel writing impacted theater, for example, the focus on physiognomy prevalent in *Jane Eyre*.<sup>viii</sup> Passions in a novel, in a play, or in life were thought to be shown in physical signifiers, as Michael Booth says, "The expression of the face [in acting] was appropriate to the use of gesture; emotion had to be obviously visible in the countenance" (192). This theatricality of appearances is shown in Brontë's physical descriptions of her characters all throughout the novel; for example, because of St. John's "nostril, his mouth, his brow, which . . . indicated elements within either restless, or hard, or eager," Jane knows his character immediately after meeting him (Brontë 409). Similarly, St. John and his sisters judge her character right after meeting Jane; for the sisters, though Jane has "a peculiar face," they believe that when she is "in good health and animated, . . . [Jane's] physiognomy would be agreeable" (Brontë 402). However, St. John traces "lines of force in her face which make [him] skeptical of her tractability" (Brontë 403). Though they disagree what her physiognomy tells about her character, clearly all three siblings believe Jane's face holds the clues to her personality.

*Nineteenth-Century Melodrama: Good vs. Evil, and Good Always Wins*

Before analyzing several individual plays in more detail, it is important to understand more about the Victorian stage and the most popular type of play demanded by Victorian audiences – the melodrama. Partially due to the legal restrictions placed on the play house by the English government and partially because of the demands of the audience of the day, there was a proliferation of melodramatic plays with prescriptive morality plots with a strong didactic tone which valued happy endings - because virtue should always triumph.

English melodrama developed as a unique form separate from French melodrama in the 1790s and was popular until the time of World War I, with its popularity central to England throughout the whole nineteenth century. However, the history of the melodrama in England can be traced much farther back in history, as far back as the fifteenth-century morality play that dramatized the struggle between good and evil with symbolic characters like Good Deeds, Avarice, Penitence, Sensual Appetite, and Humility. Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies were also a source of melodrama for the English public, with all the characteristics of melodrama except elaborate mechanical spectacle or happy endings. Eighteenth-century sentimental dramas also paved the way for nineteenth-century melodrama with their dramatizations of perfect human goodness and admiration for virtue throughout the plot lines. In addition, these sentimental dramas had stock character types such as the socially erratic hero, the wayward but penitent husband, and the comic servant (Booth 40-41). Many of the characteristics in these earlier English dramas are also apparent in nineteenth-century melodramas as well.

By the nineteenth century, melodrama was performed wherever stages and theaters sprung up, from the grand Drury Lane and Covent Garden theaters to the smallest penny gaff. Though its audiences came from all social classes, its greatest support rested among the urban

working classes, though this shifted somewhat towards the end of the nineteenth century. In Michael Booth's work on the subject, *English Melodrama*, he summarizes the genre as follows: "Essentially, melodrama is a dream world inhabited by dream people and dream justice, offering audiences the fulfillment and satisfaction found only in dreams. An idealization and simplification of the world of reality, it is in fact the world its audiences want but cannot get" (14). Booth explains how the escapist appeal found in melodrama is what has made it popular throughout the ages because, in a world of uncertainties, a fictional domain of melodrama where there is no confusion or doubt, in which good always prevails, is very attractive. He identifies two main characteristics of melodrama: plot trumping character development and an unyielding moral distinction. These two features are in fact linked together because the audience would immediately identify the moral position of each character at his or her first appearance and speech with the use of stock character types in melodrama (Booth 15). Therefore, little is left up to the audience to infer.

Playwrights were required to produce plays at an incredibly rapid pace in order to provide a living for themselves. For example, the salary of George Roberts, the resident dramatist at the Elephant and Castle, was thirty shillings a week in the 1880s. Therefore, the playwrights had to write or adapt for the stage by using tried formulas of melodrama with no time to experiment. It was common for a dramatist of the Victorian era to pen over a hundred plays in his or her lifetime, with George Dibdin Pitt producing 26 in 1847 alone. Many authors found fiction and journalism more lucrative, but those who did remain in play writing found not only low fees for writing but also a lack of copyright protection. Regardless of the popularity of a show, its producer only received one payment until the 1860s when Dion Boucicault led some writers to request a percentage of the profit so dramatists could benefit from a long-running show similar to

how playhouse owners benefitted. Nevertheless, adaptation and plain theft of plays was almost never punished so playwrights also had to contend with that financial reality (Booth 48-49). These financial realities that playwrights faced shaped how melodramas were written, produced, and acted. In addition, the widespread use of stock characters – hero, villain, heroine, old man, old woman, comic man, and comic woman – helped the playwright write more quickly while allowing the audience to easily understand the characters with very little background information about the story necessary.<sup>ix</sup>

Melodrama of this period characteristically emphasized virtue in their productions, such as in John Brougham's 1849 stage adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, which contains a heavy emphasis on Jane's virtue throughout. Her virtue is continually shown in this play, with her integrity apparent in spite of her poverty, or perhaps more accurately, because of her poverty, for she tells Lord Ingram that "the school of poverty" helps the lower classes to often have more compassion because they are "inured to suffering themselves" (Brougham, *Jane Eyre* act 1, scene 2 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 81). Peter Brooks explains that admiration of virtue is at the heart of melodrama: "Virtue is publicly recognized and admired in a movement of astonishment: [Jane] is 'femme étonnate' [an astonishing woman] . . . because her demonstration, her representation, of virtue strikes with almost physical force, astounding and convincing. The melodramatic moment of astonishment is a moment of ethical evidence and recognition" (26). Brougham's play capitalizes on melodrama's emphasis on the power of virtue despite economic hardships.

The "*Tableaux of astonishment*" at the end of the first act of Brougham's production is another example of what Brooks terms "the admiration of virtue," which is at the heart of melodrama (25). Jane artfully confronts the haughty Ingrams before Rochester arrives home,

with the curtain then falling on the “*Tableaux of astonishment*.” In Act II, Jane then progresses by expressing her moral indignation in a bitter soliloquy immediately following her place in the tableaux. In her speech, Jane’s virtue shines through despite being mocked by the Ingrams. The utilization of the “*Tableaux of astonishment*” is helpful in order to guide the viewer into her speech against the insolent and vulgar Ingrams, with her integrity highlighted in both instances.

Similarly, Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer’s play later in the nineteenth century includes distinct and clear-cut versions of morality and virtue and an emotionally less complicated plot, trademarks of melodrama from the era. Rochester’s character is changed in this version in order to provide Jane with a more moral defender than described in Brontë’s novel. The fact that Bertha is actually Rochester’s brother’s wife, not Rochester’s wife, frees him from moral blame and allows Rochester to marry Jane with no guilt on his conscience. In addition, Adèle is Bertha’s daughter conceived out of wedlock rather than Rochester’s, but he has adopted her and cares for her out of the goodness of his heart.

In Birch-Pfeiffer’s play, Jane also illustrates the melodramatic convention of “the desire to express all” (Brooks 4) when she threatens her aunt with divine vengeance:

[F]or in my presence, holding the hands of poor, dying uncle, you [Mrs. Reed] made a solemn promise to bring me up with your own children, according to my equal rights and privileges, and never to abandon me . . . When he [Mr. Reed] asks you, in the other world, how you kept your word – what you did with your orphan niece – say that you ruined her disposition by your injustice and barbarous cruelties, and then thrust her into a charity school. (Birch-Pfeiffer, *Jane Eyre or the Orphan of Lowood*, prologue, scene 7 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage*, 162)

After this dramatic condemnation of her aunt, Jane tells Brocklehurst, “I am ready to follow you.” Here Jane performs again as the typical melodrama heroine, a *femme étonnante*, as her strong virtue assaults with almost a material force, with Mrs. Reed immediately sinking on the sofa and covering her face with her hands. The strength of Jane’s virtue and high moral ground is

apparent to all in the audience as well as to Mrs. Reed on the stage due to her forceful performance.

*Class on the Stage: Did Charlotte Brontë or Karl Marx write Jane Eyre?*

In the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, theatergoers largely came from the working classes, and theaters often had a less-than-savory reputation. Theaters were associated with libertines and prostitution in the early 1800s, so many middle class patrons stayed at home. The pittites who orchestrated the Old Price riots at Covent Garden in 1809 established a type of mob rule in the theaters that lasted the next 50 years in England (Bailey 15). The perception of theaters as places only for working class members of society can be traced back to the Licensing Act of 1737 that defined the difference between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” drama in England. These distinctions were changed when theaters were deregulated in 1843, but this deregulation did not raise the reputation of the theaters in many middle class patrons’ viewpoints. Elaine Hadley argues that one reason there was an association of the lower classes with the theater was because theater provided a venue and model for political dissent and class uprising (39). The linkage of theaters with the lower classes changed, however, as the century progressed.

Eventually the rowdier patrons were lured away from the theater to music halls, the rising standards of literacy sobered much of the rest of the audience, and stalls moved the pit away from the stage, all of which encouraged more respectable members of society to come to the theater (Bailey 15). In addition, “cup and saucer” dramas such as T.W. Robertson’s *Society* (1865) and *Caste* (1867) included subject matter and set design more similar to a domestic setting, which proved attractive to the middle class. Another factor that led to what Mary Jean

Corbett has called the “*embourgeoisement* of theater” (131) was the professionalization of actors in Victorian society, shown by the end of the nineteenth-century with the first knighting of an actor, Henry Irving, in 1895. This professionalization of acting as a career was especially true for women, as earlier in the century the term *actress* was instantly associated with impropriety. By the 1880s, there was social recognition that an actress was not a synonym for a prostitute and that the career had become a respectable option (Allen 20-21). Though eventually Victorian society did not place such a negative stigma on theater, as it became open for enjoyment by all classes of citizens, the class distinctions from earlier in the century sometimes were still translated into the assumption that theater was lowbrow while literature was for the wealthier upper classes.

The most notable characteristic of John Courtney’s production *Jane Eyre or The Secrets of Thornfield Manor* (1848) is its focus on class issues and emphasizing the plight of servants. This adaptation was performed in Victoria Theatre only three months after the novel was published, with the Victoria Theatre situated in a rough neighborhood with a largely working class audience. The owner of the Victoria Theatre knew that the only hope of financial success depended on a clear message that could be understood by anyone who might have come to see the show that evening, making melodramatic themes a perfect choice (Cross 28). The demographic make-up of their audience helps to explain several differences in this adaptation from Brontë’s source text. The introduction of servants in Courtney’s plot for *Jane Eyre* is not only a financially motivated decision, but it also helps to reorientate the audience’s perspective on the novel.

Though excluding references to the aristocracy of the Ingram family, the 1848 play clearly highlights the difficult predicament of servants and the lower classes and includes an additional cast of comedic servants that are introduced at the beginning of this play – Joe Joker,

Betty Bunce, and Sally Suds. The very first scenes of the play come from the servants' point of view when they complain about the low pay and bad conditions at Lowood. After Mr. Brocklehurst calls in the law to deal with them, they trick the constable and the beadle by diving through a window into a water-but.

Jane's character is associated with the working class throughout Courtney's production. In the introduction to the play, the servant Betty Bunch tells the audience that most of the "scholars" at Lowood "are orphans with cruel uncles and aunts who send them out of the way to be thumped, bumped and consumptionized" (Courtney, *Jane Eyre or The Secrets of Thornfield Manor*, act 1, scene 1 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 32). This alignment of Jane with the orphans of the school as well as the servants makes it clear that they all are victims of oppression. Jane joins in the public denouncement of Brocklehurst with the lines: "Charity! Oh, 'tis a monstrous mockery of it, 'tis persecution upon the helpless and unprotected – and I tell you, sir that you should blush to own such feelings as inhabit your cold and uncharitable heart" (Courtney, *Jane Eyre or The Secrets of Thornfield Manor*, act 1, scene 1 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 35), once again showing camaraderie with the working class. Jane leaves Lowood along with the servants Joe and Betty, so her departure and journey appear less lonely than part of a concerted uprising of class victims. Aligning Jane the heroine with the servants reduces her individuality and changes the realities of class stratification; exaggerating Jane's lowly status emphasizes her class effrontery because she dares to assert equality with the upper class (Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 15). Issues related to class trump the other characteristics in Courtney's adaptation.

The morality and inventiveness of servants and victims is accentuated in Courtney's play, showing the parasitic middle classes to be the true class enemy. As most costermongers would

hold little affection for the police, the humiliation of the constable, the beadle, and the self-serving shopman in the play would have appealed to the typical audience at the Victoria Theatre. Interestingly, 1848, the year of this play, is the same year Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*, making the exaggerated representation of Jane's sense of class oppression particularly timely.

The following year John Brougham produced a new theatric adaptation, *Jane Eyre* (1849), using Courtney's play as a source text (rather than Brontë's novel). This play is first performed at the Bowery Theatre in New York, situated in a working class neighborhood. Similar to Courtney, Brougham chooses to focus primarily on class conflict in his adaptation, though he puts the aristocracy in the spotlight as compared to Courtney's emphasis on the middle class as the enemy in his play from the previous year. Jane delivers a bitter soliloquy after being put down by the wealthy Ingrams because of her status as a lowly governess:

Shame, shame upon their cruelty; . . . Better, a thousand times better, my solitary cell once more than be gibed and mocked at by the vulgar-wealthy; to have the badge of servitude engraved upon my very heart, and know that tyrant circumstance has placed me in a world all prison, where every human being is a watchful jailor, and where you must endure the unceasing lash of insolence, the certain punishment of that statuteless but unforgiven crime, poverty. (Brougham, *Jane Eyre* act 2, scene 2 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 84)

Though Jane was alone when confronting the aristocrats, she is provided with companionship in her stance on virtue by the friendship of the servants who soon cluster around her in approval and later, with Jane and Rochester's final reconciliation, the peasants welcome them both with cheering. In Brougham's play Jane is not alone in her fight against the injustice of the patronizing aristocracy but is joined by others of the working class who have been put down by society as well.

The appeal to the class struggle in Brougham's play would have been popular with the American audiences viewing this play, with American audiences having similar tastes as English viewers across the Atlantic. Early American theatre, similar to English theatre, was formed along class lines, with class awareness and class acrimony shaping much of the drama performed. According to Mettinger-Schartmann, melodrama, with its common theme of class, made it a perfect choice for this audience (385). By considering his immediate audience, Broughman enjoyed short-term success from this play that emphasized a theme popular in the current political atmosphere.

*Education on the Stage: Will the Governess Get the Job?*

The role of the governess – a position Brontë herself filled in her own lifetime – can be read as a type of actor in the narrative. Joseph Litvak classifies the governess's role not as literal, "but always furtively and disingenuously figurative" and views the demystification with restraint present throughout the novel as a certain unmasking that he sees as theatrical as well (33, 49). He argues that "the plots of Brontë's novels notoriously refuse the comforts of linearity, intensifying the demand for demystification precisely by frustrating it," with *Jane Eyre* institutionalizing "the obstacles to unmediated and unpremeditated expression and understanding" even as it claims direct communication from the narrator (Litvak 31). The opacity of the plot and the characters, and especially Jane in her role as a governess, can be viewed as another layer of theatricality central to this text and another example how novels and the theater shared a much more complex and interconnected relationship than is always acknowledged. The theatricality of the role of governess was perfect for the stage in the nineteenth century.

Jane's role as a governess is emphasized in Brougham's adaptation, and the aristocratic community visiting Thornfield has much to say on the subject. Blanche Ingram looks forward to seeing the lowly governess "blush and tremble" when she finds herself "in an aristocratic element" (Brougham, *Jane Eyre*, act 1, scene 2 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 79). However, in spite of the unkindness and rudeness from the upper class Ingrams, Jane maintains her cool and publicly scolds them for their bad manners and ill treatment.

In addition to the treatment of the role of governess, it is interesting to look at how the Lowood School is portrayed on the stage. Charity school management was a topic in the news of the day, and Courtney made sure to include this in his play as well. One of the reviews of his play invokes the current scandal related to a Yorkshire school by drawing parallels with Mr. Squeers's establishment (in *Nicholas Nickleby*) (Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 30). Courtney's 1948 play begins with scenes at Lowood School, where Jane is already a teacher, and this adaptation expresses clear condemnation of charity school management by including the cruel treatment of the girls as well as the misuse of funds under Mr. Brocklehurst's direction, such as his advice to Betty to use soda instead of soap when laundering the girls' clothes. Jane clearly admonishes "those who dispense their wealth for the instruction of their poorer fellow beings" to "see more closely into the conduct of those into whose hands they place their trust" (Courtney, *Jane Eyre of The Secrets of Thornfield Manor*, act 1, scene 1 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 35). Courtney tapped into the controversial subject of the treatment at charity schools to capitalize in a market that was interested in this topic as it had recently appeared in its own newspapers.

*Gender on the Stage: Nothing Radical Here*

As Courtney's play changes the emphasis of the novel by exaggerating class oppression, it completely ignores the novel's feminist politics; the potentially radical implications of Jane's relationship with Rochester in the novel are changed to stereotypical feminine and masculine roles throughout the play. The self-determination that she exhibits in the novel is not present in this play. Similar to a fairy tale, in this play Jane marries Rochester as Cinderella gets the Prince, and the audience receives none of Brontë's feminism from her novel. It could be argued that the novel also ends with the marriage of Rochester and Jane, undermining the message of women being the deciders of their own destiny as portrayed elsewhere in the novel, as Jane is still confined to the home as a wife in the end. However, Rochester's wounding at the end provides a twist in the novel that can be viewed as bringing the two into a more equal marriage, as Rochester's power is decreased, Jane's is increased in their relationship.<sup>x</sup> Regardless, Courtney's stage adaptation plays it safe by providing the characteristic happy ending for his melodrama.

Similar to Courtney's play, the benign reconciliation at the ending of Brougham's play shows how the feminism present in the novel was erased from this stage adaptation as well. Inevitably Rochester and Jane do end up together, but the emphasis is more on class conflict than romance. At the end of *Jane Eyre* (1849), Rochester is called the "farmer's friend," emphasizing the poor farmer's plight in a society full of class divides and bringing the message back to the class conflict and difference. Interestingly, Kerry Powell posits that the playwrights' gender influenced this choice of elevating the struggle against the upper class rather than against woman's unequal role in society: "The fate of *Jane Eyre* on stage was typical of dramatizations of Victorian novels by women. Male playwrights brought the perspective of their own gender to these hijacked narratives and invariably diminished the importance and power of women in

comparison with the roles given them in novels” (105). This idea would explain Courtney and Brougham’s plays with their focus on class relations rather than gender relations; however, its argument would fall somewhat short with the next adaptation, this time by a woman.

Unlike the two earlier stage productions, Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer’s play *Jane Eyre or The Orphan of Lowood* (1870) places gender relations front and center rather than issues of class. From Powell’s statement relating to male playwrights in the Victorian era that adapted novels by women into plays, one might assume a female playwright would retain the power and significance of women in novels more so than her male counterparts, but that is certainly not the case here. Though Birch-Pfeiffer does focus on gender relations more in her version, nevertheless, she does not retain the strength or power of the feminist heroine of the novel. Jane is portrayed as a victim, though a victim with talent. Rochester is very impressed by her paintings, but after her artistic talent is recognized by the familial “protector,” no real revision of gender relations is apparent. Significantly, the first English version of Birch-Pfeiffer’s play was performed in 1867, the same year of the Second Parliamentary Reform Bill in England, which enfranchised most middle-class men. But John Stuart Mill’s amendment for women’s suffrage was not passed because it was said that the protection of a male relative was enough to care for and protect women. English patrons of the theatre during this time period likely would have picked up on the politics of the play, including Birch-Pfeiffer’s treatment of women and the role of protector that men were called to play in society as portrayed on the stage.

Paternalism is central in Birch-Pfeiffer’s adaptation, a responsibility that extends beyond the immediate family, so that Rochester is described as a father to the whole neighborhood. The importance of caring for orphans is a theme throughout this play, in regards to the orphan Jane and the orphan Adèle. Aunt Reed’s servant Henry wishes he could provide for the orphan Jane.

Jane declares Rochester's paternal care "meritorious," again presenting Rochester as a more moral character than the original text describes. As the man in authority, Rochester declares himself as Jane's protector, which allows her to sleep well and causes her to declare "we have a severe but a reliable protector – now we have a MAN in the house!" (Birch-Pfeiffer *Jane Eyre or The Orphan of Lowood*, act 1, scene 6 qtd. in Stoneman, *Jane Eyre on Stage* 171). With Mrs. Reed taking the part of Lady Ingram, she attempts to drive Jane away from Thornfield so Rochester can marry her daughter Lady Georgina Clarens (née Reed). Instead of trying to fend for herself, Jane plans to flee to another male authority figure, her rich uncle. In Birch-Pfeiffer's play, there is less emphasis on Jane's ability to defend herself and more prominence placed on her having a resilient and honorable defender in a man. The language of the play coincides with the politics of the protectorate, making it clear that a male guardian is important in a woman's life.

Recent publications have explored the link between melodrama and modernity.<sup>xi</sup> There is a growing understanding that melodrama has played a "key role in modernity as a mediator of social and political change through the diverse and personalized forms of popular culture" (Bratton, Cook, and Gledhill 8). This can be seen specifically in the trajectory of *Jane Eyre* adaptations into the twentieth century, as there are many elements of melodrama evident in the first film to be discussed in the next chapter.

### Chapter 3 - Twentieth-Century Film Adaptations: Jane Meets the Twentieth Century

As cinema and television became a dominant means of entertainment in the twentieth century, understandably many of the literary adaptations occurred on film and television screens, though there still were a number of stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* during the century as well.<sup>xii</sup> We now focus on three film adaptations of *Jane Eyre* produced throughout the twentieth century – in the years 1943, 1970, and 1996, spanning the century from the Hollywood era of films to the heritage film popularity at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>xiii</sup> The Internet Movie Database, a rough comparative guide, shows that the number of films based on classic novels and plays was basically constant throughout the twentieth century when viewed as a general category; however, if one separates different authors or genres of writing, there were some loose trends of adaptation throughout the twentieth century. The 1920s was a big decade for Dickens adaptations with 35 adaptations, whereas no one adapted Trollope until 1974. Henry James had 18 adaptations during the 1970s, while there were twenty Dostoevsky films produced in the 1990s. Despite the fact that overall there is not one period with substantively more literary adaptations, the first two decades of Hollywood talkies are known for an especially large number of literary adaptations (Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* 153). Film producer and film studio executive David O. Selznick was especially well known for his use of novels and plays when producing movies, and he stated that he depended on literature for cultural capital because it was “like giving oneself a good address” (qtd. in Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* 154). Though Selznick did not produce a *Jane Eyre* adaptation, his general philosophy was still common in Hollywood when *Jane Eyre* was adapted in 1943.

The theories of intersectionality are helpful in sifting through these three twentieth-century films, which, like Brontë’s novel, enables multiple aspects of a character, whether

gender, race, class, sexuality, or disability, to be analyzed from a variety of points of view without excluding other aspects of a character. As discussed in length in Chapter 1, a wide variety of races, gender roles, class, sexual relationships, and disabilities were represented in some form or fashion in the novel *Jane Eyre*, whereas in these three film adaptations from the twentieth century there is less of a cross section of representation of these characteristics. Race is not breeched in any of these cinematic adaptations, with the possibility of Bertha being black never mentioned and definitely not shown on screen. The class difference between characters, namely the lower-class governess Jane as compared with the upper-class landowner Rochester and the wealthy Ingrams, is shown in all three films, though not explored in much depth.

However, gender is the aspect of these characters most heavily explored in all three cinematic adaptations of *Jane Eyre* in relation to their portrayals of feminist ideals. Gender is shown, with more or less feminist inclinations, progressing from a suppression of female self-sufficiency in the 1943 film to an endorsement of overt second-wave feminist ideology in the 1970 movie to a more nuanced and complicated third-wave of feminism present in the 1996 film. The expression of sexual tension and attraction between Jane and Rochester are shown in each of these adaptations, but in a socially constructed “normal” sexuality of the time period in which each film is produced. Jane’s sexuality is conflated with her maternal instincts in the 1943 film, which was socially accepted in 1940s America, whereas Jane’s sexuality in the 1970 production emphasizes equality between both genders, again, which was socially accepted in the majority of 1970s America. In the 1996 movie, sexual tension and attraction between Jane and Rochester are shown but in a more subdued format as compared to the more sexually explicit demonstrations in many contemporary media sources, giving its female viewers an alternative to the sexualized environment of the 1990s.

A change from the stage productions of the previous century, the film adaptations of this narrative in the twentieth century change the focus towards Jane and Rochester's romantic relationship, though this is portrayed in very different ways throughout the novel's film adaptation history. Liora Brosh warns against using simplistic ideological categorizations when discussing novels and their adaptations, such as the novel being "feminist" and the movie being "anti-feminist," because "such labels assume the existence of coherent meanings and ignore the ideological tensions and inconsistencies inherent in popular art forms such as nineteenth-century novels and twentieth-century films" (Brosh 10-11). While acknowledging Brosh's warning, I do think we can look at specific elements within an adaptation and gather important conclusions related to a social movement, such as feminism, in my discussion of these three films provided that the conclusions are specific and limited rather than purporting to generalize the broad and diverse movement that can be summarized as "feminism."

*Gender Representations in the Twentieth Century: It All Depends on the Decade*

Twentieth Century Fox released a film adaptation of Brontë's novel on Christmas Eve 1943. Directed by Robert Stevenson, the film stars Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine as the leading characters of Rochester and Jane, with Elizabeth Taylor making a short appearance as Helen. The screenplay for this movie was written and revised multiple times between 1940 and 1943, a time period when women's lives were drastically changing due to the American involvement in the Second World War. The war increased the demand for women to enter the work force, and after the attack on Pearl Harbor the work force increased by 6.5 million women. By the time the movie was released, 37 percent of all American women were in the work force, many in well-paying unionized jobs such as in munitions plants and aircraft industries (Brosh

48). In late 1943, when *Jane Eyre* began to show in theaters, there were rumors that the war would be over soon, which led to a systematic campaign to encourage women to return home to their children, leaving their jobs, especially the better-paying unionized jobs, for the men returning from war. This film adaptation tried to dissipate anxieties about women leaving their maternal domestic roles and helped construct a more traditional depiction of motherhood that would have been in line with the ideals supported by the leaders in business and government who were advocating women to return to the home after the war. This movie can be viewed as essentially anti-Rosie the Riveter and the earlier campaign to recruit women to work in factories during World War II.

The importance of a strong female character is downplayed in this adaptation; though Jane remains resolute in the face of the harsh treatment at Lowood, overall she is demure and reserved in this movie. Having starred in Hitchcock's film *Rebecca* only three years prior, the actress Fontaine's naturally compliant and meek style amplifies Jane's passivity. Jane's sexuality and desire is not shown or implied in this film, instead "redefining the terms of sexual desire, by rooting female sexuality in maternal bonds" (Brosh 57). By increasing the importance of the mother/daughter bond within the projected feminine ideal, there is a de-emphasis in this adaptation of the importance of feminine self-sufficiency or love and romance for its own sake apart from children.

In the novel, the absence of a mother or any decent mother figures liberates Jane and helps to reconfigure gender identities in a manner radically different from the ideal of Victorian English society (Dever 31). However, ideal womanhood is portrayed in the 1943 film adaptation as maternal and home centered, which stems from the social concerns of the time as the Second World War was almost over. This fundamental change to the plot is shown in several ways

throughout the movie. The film changes two of the novel's characters, Bessie and Mrs. Reed, so they can epitomize the ideal mother (Bessie) and its antithesis (Mrs. Reed). Both Helen and Adèle, whose actresses incidentally look very similar, are characters used in this film to represent a feminine influence that will ultimately liberate Jane: Helen tries to free Jane from Brocklehurst's "jail" in Lowood and Adèle frees Jane from her mental imprisonment. Jane's happiness is linked not only with romance (with Rochester) but to the bonding of a child (Adèle) as well (Brosh 53-55). This is a divergence from the novel that again makes the mother/daughter bond central to Jane's development.

Jane's passivity is reinforced by Welles's portrayal of a very strong Byronic Rochester character – tall, dark, broad chested, and gruff in all his manners. The character of Rochester in Brontë's novel also has all these same features, but this adaptation seems to emphasize them to the extreme, thus giving him more power in the relationship dynamic with Jane. The fantasy of masculine dominance and female submission would have been popular for at least some of the audience of 1940s America. Jane also is placed as Rochester's observer in this adaptation, watching him from the window, from the corner of the room, throughout the whole film. The audience keeps Jane's point of view, but, interestingly, her gaze is focused on Rochester as an object of desire, which is an unusual reversal of the normal situation in film where the man often looks on the woman as an object of desire so that the audience sees the woman in that manner as well. However, this reversal of the look does not yield any more power or sway for Jane in her relationship with Rochester (Ellis and Kaplan 89). Thus, this reversal of gaze is another example of the feminine ideal of this adaptation.

Delbert Mann's *Jane Eyre* movie was released to a very different film audience in 1970 compared to the World War II audience in the 1940s, with the feminist movement gaining

traction in the national (and international) political scene. Susannah York plays a decorous and self-confident Jane from the beginning of the movie, which opens in Lowood, eliminating any portrayal of her destitute beginnings at Gateshead. George C. Scott plays Rochester as an older, frail, and more humanized character than the strongly Byronic Welles several decades prior.

The more egalitarian relationship portrayed between Jane and Rochester mirrors the political goals of many members of Western society in the 1960s and 1970s. As the new wave of feminism was in its most enthusiastic and hopeful phase, Jane's rise in power and Rochester's domestication in this adaptation would have appealed to the audience of the early 1970s. The screenwriter Jack Pulman tells that "the most important thing [he] wanted to do with Jane and Rochester was to present this relationship which was one of total inequality in a class sense but one of total equality in a human sense" (qtd. in Lee 289). The witty dialogue Pulman writes for Jane and Rochester intentionally reduces the economic differences between the governess and her employer and instead focuses on the compatibility of two human beings. There also is a more equal portrayal of both Rochester and Jane's powers of gaze and speech within this adaptation. The camera alternates from Jane's and Rochester's points of view throughout, which helps the audience identify with both characters. There are numerous long shots for both characters, as well as plenty of close up shots of Jane that show her thinking, emphasizing her depth as an intelligent character.

As the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s likely helped shape the message of equality central to Mann's 1970 film, a different awareness of power within feminist discourse is apparent in the 1996 *Jane Eyre* movie directed by Franco Zeffirelli, produced in the heart of the heritage film phenomena. Jane, played by Charlotte Gainsbourg, and Rochester, played by

William Hurt, present a somewhat more complex picture of gender relations, including an emphasis on the sexuality of both Rochester and Jane.

Visual imagery is effectively used in this film to construct and deconstruct the female image as Zeffirelli turns normalized standards on their heads in order to challenge audience expectations. One example of this is Gainsbourg, cast as the lead actress, whose appearance contradicts the beauty typically associated with a Hollywood actress. Gainsbourg epitomizes a stereotypical governess as well as the one described in Brontë's novel – with a plain appearance and almost always wearing a prim black dress and bonnet. Her plain exterior serves as a kind of mask to diminish other's gaze on her, thus "distancing . . . the female self from image to replace it with the more active presence of the look [and] is . . . exemplified in Jane's determined look in the mirror" (Lee 298). When Jane hears about Blanche's beauty, Jane disassociates herself from the perception of a perfect image by poignantly looking into a mirror and stating simply, "You are a fool." The audience realizes that this is a private image, not meant for them, thus emphasizing the fact that image can be something other than what is normally expected.

In the novel, as well as in many of the other adaptations, there is a marked absence of supportive female characters; however, the 1996 film provides more of a supportive female community that strengthens Jane throughout the movie. There is an added scene in which Brocklehurst cuts off both Helen's and Jane's hair, the two girls standing in solidarity against his cruel practices. Miss Temple's support helped sustain Jane through her growing up years, and her motherly and kind support is continued in a like manner by Mrs. Fairfax and St. John's sister Mary, both identifying with Miss Temple by their similar style of white collared dress and their kind dispositions throughout the movie. Another supporting female character, Bertha, is included and visually shown but again plays a very minor role in this adaptation.

Though the character of Jane in Zeffirelli's film is clearly not a poster child for the more "radical" feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, she nonetheless is a more nuanced female character. This portrayal of a woman with many desires, not all of which line up with what others think is best for her, seems more in line with the reality of the experience of being a woman in a complicated world with pulls in many directions as to what is expected of and encouraged for a "modern" woman. Lee suggests that the 1996 film can be explained in relation to Moi's three stages of the development of feminism, arguing that the last stage in which "women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical" characterize this adaptation of *Jane Eyre* because it not only presents Rochester as both the object and the subject of sexual desires, but it also portrays Jane as desiring Rochester and, at the same time, wanting to be desired by him (296). I agree that there is desire on both sides of the relationship, partially expressed through the camera's aligning with Jane's subjective perspective and moving with her point of view, mirroring a certainty that is filtered through her feelings. But, at the same time, I concur with Barbara Schaff who argues in "The Strange After-Lives of *Jane Eyre*" that Zeffirelli reinforces "the binary opposition between Jane's juvenile rebelliousness and adult submissiveness by emphasizing her development from an angry girl into an obedient wife" (32). The fact that Jane eventually loses her youthful, rebellious temperament in favor of settling down as a dutiful wife undercuts some of the equality established by the film showing how strongly Jane and Rochester desire each other.

Some of these feminist problems with Jane's "reform" at the end of the story can be traced back to the source text and is also found in the criticism from feminist scholars who find substantial problems with the ending Brontë wrote in 1847. Unless the ending is drastically altered from Brontë's ending, perhaps it will always be difficult for a modern feminist scholar to

read (or watch) the ending of *Jane Eyre* without a small, or large, desire to insert some new ideas into the narrative to provide more agency for Jane in the end. Though these adaptations are not driven by fidelity to the original, I think the reason none of these adaptations completely rewrite the ending is because the romance plot is emphasized in these films. With the strong emphasis on the romantic relationship between Jane and Rochester, the eventual marriage plays to a primarily female audience that often desires a happy ending to a romantic film.

Since romance is the theme that links all three of these twentieth-century adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, with each film highlighting the romantic relationship between Rochester and Jane, it is fruitful to consider linkages between the different films related to their depictions of this relationship on screen. In *Victorian Vogue*, Diane Sadoff argues that Stevenson's 1943 *Jane Eyre* film "indulged female attraction to, anxiety about, and rage against spectacular masculinity even as [it] reaffirmed sexual fidelity for a post-Depression and an interwar era anxious about fiscal constraint and indebtedness, worried about women at work, and fearful of increasing strife in Europe" (76). In other words, a domineering male role in romance is portrayed in the 1943 film at the same time as traditional marriage is encouraged, an inherently contradictory message.

These fantasies are accomplished by the careful selection and presentation of the key actor in the 1943 film, Orson Welles, who plays Rochester. Welles's extreme masculinity is increased by the cinematographer George Barnes, heightening his power by shooting the short actor towering over the slight, docile Fontaine. In addition, Rene Hubert dressed Welles in glamorous coattails, heightening heels, and cloaks replete with intricate detail. Welles is shot from extreme close-up from a low camera angle or in dark gothic interiors, with both kinds of shots highlighting the "gaslight" gothic-romance conventions (Sadoff 76). Welles's intense

masculinity contributes to his domineering and heavy-handed role in his relationship with Jane's character.

Therefore, though many aspects of the Stevenson movie can be seen as complicit in the suppression of women's self-sufficiency in this time period, Sadoff's perspective provides a seedier under-story that, she argues, is occurring at the same time as the surface-level drama is unfolding on the screen. In other words, the film provides "the wished-for narrative conclusion, monogamous heterosexual coupling" at the same time as it illustrates "perverse pleasures antithetical to wedded bliss" (Sadoff 72), including dominating/submissive roles in romance.

A direct connection between the privileged icons in the 1943 *Jane Eyre* film and the less powerful actors playing in the 1996 film can be drawn, as each film responds to the anxieties of the age, and especially to the anxieties of the women of the age. Sadoff indicts Zeffirelli's film, charging him with only modernizing female submission by suppressing the sexual imaginations that drive the romance genre and attempting to make romance acceptable to postfeminist female viewers. Sadoff believes that William Hurt portrays Rochester as kindhearted and sympathetic, a "thoroughly modern neurotic" instead of the domineering brute who "disables romance's disavowal of male brutality" in the 1943 film (82). Her comparison between the 1943 and 1996 actors playing Rochester is similar to her overall evaluation of the two film adaptations.

Though claiming not to endorse the sexual fantasies celebrated in the 1943 film of a domineering man and submissive woman, Sadoff certainly thinks that that film was more successful in appealing to its intended audience. She states that "the 1940s perverse sexual scenarios indulged female fantasy even as they enhanced masculine power . . . serv[ing] wounded, impoverished, and worried midcentury males and fearful and overburdened females" (82). Conversely, the tepid zeitgeist of Zeffirelli's 1996 film, with a pallid hero and a passive

heroine, was unsuccessful in awakening spectatorial desire or identification from her perspective. For Sadoff, “[d]uring a consumerist and spendthrift decade of post-Gulf War self-satisfaction, . . . it failed to arouse female desire or to attract postfeminist men” (82-83). I do not agree with her condemnation of Zeffirelli’s film as I do not see the hero and heroine in such weak and passive roles as Sadoff describes. However, I do find evidence to support her ideas that heterosexual marriage is being encouraged in the 1943 *Jane Eyre* film at the same time as it introduces less widely accepted sexual practices, granted, portrayed in a more nuanced fashion. In addition, I found her analysis of the use of the romance plot in each of these films in an attempt to appeal to the audience of their day as insightful for this project as well.

With numerous heritage films being produced in the 1990s, though Sadoff may disapprove of the message of the 1996 *Jane Eyre* film, many others have different ideas about heritage films in general and Zeffirelli’s film in particular. An alternative perspective on heritage films in the 1990s, including Zeffirelli’s adaptation, is that the popularity of Victorian novel adaptations in the 1990s partially stemmed from the desire for an alternative view of femininity as opposed to the overly sexualized media representations of women as commonly portrayed in films such as *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *Terminator 2* (1991) as well as in the pages of *Playboy* and *Sports Illustrated*, which can partly be held responsible for legitimizing soft porn in mainstream culture. The fully clothed female characters from the Victorian and Edwardian eras were refreshing after Sharon Stone’s naked scenes and the striptease performed by Demi Moore, presenting an alternative sexuality that was in stark contrast to the developments in the wider culture (Brosh 109-110). The 1996 *Jane Eyre* may not be the strongest example of this phenomena, such as when Zeffirelli includes a scene of Jane wistfully examining a picture of Rochester in lieu of the scene in the novel when Jane strides back and forth on the battlements of

Thornfield and delivers her speech expressing feminine frustration in a patriarchal world. This example shows how sometimes the 1996 film translates the explicit cravings for an expanded horizon in Brontë's novel into a more romantic discourse in the film (Brosh 130-131).

Regardless, I would argue that other aspects of the 1996 film still cause it to be included in the general trend of many adaptations of this time period that built a utopian space in which women could "have it all" by "merging the eroticism of costume drama with a new feminist triumphalism" (Brosh 111) despite the fact that there were some perceived weakenings of the feminist message in the film at the same time.

In the 1990s, the third wave of academic feminism was anything but a unified voice, with feminist scholars using Foucault and postmodern theoretical models to oppose more culturally visible and accessible bestselling feminist authors publishing for the general public. Films, not surprisingly, drew on both of these contradictory forms of feminism in order to increase their commercial viability, with many of the classical literary adaptations produced between 1995 and 2000 showing women as both victims and as empowered individuals. Despite the critique of some feminists that these films leave out the broader feminist social critique seen in the literary classics, these films show female characters that are successful in escaping sexual threat, who find a safe place for an erotically fulfilling relationship, all at the same that women viewers of the 1990s could escape from the crass sexually dominant culture of the West. Though few would celebrate feminism as accomplishing all of its goals by the 1990s, clearly there has been much improvement if one uses the domestic novel of the Victorian era as a benchmark of where women were and how far they had progressed and these film adaptations of the 1990s as case studies (Brosh 118, 139-140). As is often the case, perhaps the feminist implications did not go

far enough for some critics, but there nonetheless are significant repercussions from the alternative femininity shown in these films.

*Who is the Woman in the Attic?*

Bertha Rochester is often seen as Jane's double in the narrative and therefore could play a key female role in these film adaptations, though the reality is different than the potential. The Stevenson film's portrayal of Bertha, or lack thereof, is further evidence of the removal of female power from the 1943 adaptation. She is only shown as a shadow, a non-being, and as an unknown malevolent power that separates Rochester from Jane. The audience never gets a glimpse of Bertha's face or even her entire body; all that is shown is a brief shot of her hands trying to strangle Rochester. Severing any possibility of a doubling tie between Jane and Bertha, this adaptation instead categorizes women into stereotypes that denote men's desire – Jane as “the angelic domestic woman and [Bertha as] the woman who threatens male power” (Lee 287). The lack of potential doubling with these two characters, as posited by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, serves to reduce the depth of the feminine in this adaptation.

Though she still plays a minor role, Bertha is nonetheless physically present and is humanized in the 1970 adaptation by Mann. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* had been published only four years before this film, which may have influenced the makers of this version to include a somewhat more sympathetic depiction of Bertha. Perhaps the most telling scene including Bertha is when Jane has left after the aborted wedding scene, but Rochester remains in the attic to converse with Bertha. Bertha tackles Rochester to the ground, where they lie for a moment together, similar to lovers, during which she pants somewhat, increasing the sexual undertones of the scene. After they get up, he strokes Bertha's hair and asks her how they should spend the

evening, which reminds the audience of what a more “traditional” married couple might do on a typical evening. This poignant scene increases our compassion for both of these characters – for Bertha because you clearly see her as a pitiful victim here and for Rochester because you remember that he has compassion for her insofar as he has not placed her in an asylum. While I agree with Stoneman’s assertion that the film emphasizes “the continuities not disparities” between Jane and Bertha by portraying Bertha’s humanity more than previous adaptations (*Brontë Transformations* 192), nonetheless, Bertha is still a minor character, and the main focus of the film is on Jane and Rochester’s relationship.

With a growing awareness of mental illness in society at large, Zeffirelli’s 1996 adaptation *Jane Eyre* depicts Bertha less like a raving lunatic as in the novel and in the 1943 film but more like a depressed, but calm, woman. Close-up shots of Bertha’s face reveal a torment and sadness in her countenance, stirring the audience to feel empathy for this character that typically is so calm you almost wonder why she is even locked away in the first place. Lisa Hopkins states:

There is thus nothing in the film to direct our sympathies away from Bertha, and when we first see her, she indeed looks more pitiable than anything else, cowering close to the fire as if she is cold. Though we are left with no doubt that she is violent, it is by no means so clear that she is malevolent; it would seem absurd to hold such a creature responsible for her actions. (95)

This compassionate portrayal of Bertha in Zeffirelli’s film likely is due to an audience that expects a sympathetic depiction of mental illness in the late twentieth century. Despite the more empathetic representation, still Bertha’s character plays a very small role in the overall story in this 1996 movie.

As discussed earlier, postcolonialist scholars have brought up several problematic issues related to Bertha’s treatment as the “other” in the source text; however, even though Brontë’s

depiction of Bertha raises issues, the adaptations of *Jane Eyre* seem to bring up even more questions related to Bertha due to their almost universal reduction in her storyline as part of the overall narrative as well as no exploration of her racial background. Bertha's character has been systematically sidelined and kept in the attic. In the nineteenth-century plays discussed earlier, she is either barely mentioned or instead cast as Rochester's brother's wife, thus alleviating Rochester from any blame in the relationship. In the twentieth-century movies, she goes from not even being shown in the 1943 film to at least having a role in the later films, but always as a very minor character, almost like an after thought. It would be interesting to see a modern adaptation that explores her role in greater detail. After almost 170 years in the marketplace and despite the plethora of adaptations already available, I would argue that *Jane Eyre* might be ready for yet another adaptation – maybe a film from Bertha's perspective next time, with some inspiration pulled from *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well as some of the critical scholarly work on this text.

*The Problematic Ending: Can We Ever Be Happy With It?*

Instead of the ambiguous and somewhat troubling ending found in Brontë's novel, Stevenson's adaptation ends with a simple tableau of Jane and Rochester happily married with a young son with Rochester suffering no physical disabilities. Also a typical feature of nineteenth-century melodrama, this happy ending in 1943 helps reinforce a stable feminine ideal and asserts the significance of marriage, home, and motherhood, especially critical as the Second World War was drawing to a close (Brosh 64). Audiences may have been content with a happily-ever-after ending, but feminist film scholars find fault with such a simplistic ending, though arguably feminist literary scholars have similar complaints with the novel's ending as well, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1.

In both the 1970 and 1996 films, the endings are happy in the sense that Jane and Rochester marry, but the scenes are presented in a less simplistic, more nuanced manner – showing that even in happy endings, not everything is always tied up with a tidy bow on top. In the ending of the 1970 adaptation, Jane is the one who proposes to Rochester: “I’ve come home, Edward. Let me stay,” which shows Jane’s assertiveness in the relationship. Jane has no inheritance or family ties, nor is Rochester’s sight restored in this film. There seems no need to add these aspects to the ending, as gender, class, and economic issues are less important in this version, with equality rising as the moral issue of the film (Lee 295). In the 1996 *Jane Eyre*, Rochester’s physical disabilities are shown in graphic detail, including severe burns to the face from the Thornfield fire. Though there is happiness in these endings, there is also suffering and pain that remain.

Similar to the problematic representations of Bertha in these adaptations (and arguably in the novel as well), the marriage of Rochester and Jane in the end of the novel and all these adaptations can prove a hang-up for many readers and viewers. It is interesting that, despite the discomfort so many have with Jane settling for a typical gendered role of wife and mother, there are no stage or film adaptations with an alternative ending.<sup>xiv</sup> Perhaps society’s desire for a happy ending still is too strong to be thwarted by directors. Or maybe, despite many viewers never actually reading the novel, the underlying narrative of *Jane Eyre* holds such a key place in our culture that adapters are not willing to risk upsetting society’s expectation of what occurs at the end of a story that is so well known.

*Interaction with Brontë's Text: May I Quote from the Author Please?*

It was a common trend in Hollywood at the 1930s and 1940s to include direct reference to the literary source of a film adapted from literature, often with a screen shot of the “novel” opening the drama; however, this screen shot of the “novel” is not always the actual beginning of the original novel but a fictitious text. Using text in film was nothing new, as Kamilla Elliott notes that “some silent film editing, far from freeing film from its dependence on verbal language, is based in it,” showing that the noncinematic intertitles of silent films were an important component of these films (90). These intertitles created an early form of montage and helped cement a fascination with printed word, books, and authors in film that persists to this day but was especially popular in the 1930s and 1940s (Leitch, *Film Adaptations and Its Discontents* 157). Many producers in this early cinematic period, as well as some today, tried to use the illusion of fidelity to the source novel as a means to increase the popularity of their film.

*Jane Eyre* is no exception to this trend in an obsession with the printed word and the original literary source being shown on screen. At the end of the credit sequence, there appears a page headed “Jane Eyre. Chapter I,” followed by: “My name is Jane Eyre. I was born in 1820, a harsh time of change in England. Money and position seemed all that mattered. Charity was a cold and disagreeable word. Religion too often wore a mask of bigotry and cruelty. There was no proper place for the poor or the unfortunate. I had no father or mother, no brother or sister. As a child I lived with my aunt, Mrs. Reed of Gateshead Hall. I do not remember that she ever spoke one kind word to me.” However, the actual first page of Brontë’s novel reads: “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning . . .” (Brontë 9). The text shown in the film quickly provides background information about the main characters of the narrative and identifies key themes that the

audience should be watching for in the film: class, charity, religion, and bigotry. This introduction helps the viewer come up to speed on the gist of the narrative in a short amount of time. The more descriptive (and much longer) opening to the novel provides more insight into the thoughts of each character of the narrative and explicit details of the daily torture Jane experienced in her Aunt Reed's home, and therefore, the themes of the novel are not apparent until more of the story is played out as the story progresses.

The 1943 *Jane Eyre* film helps confer textual authority on its fictitious opening to Brontë's novel similar to how the phrase "based on a true story" appeals to the authority of a master text, regardless of the fact that often there is no actual text available to peruse for these films. The 1847 novel, of course, is available to any viewer of the *Jane Eyre* film who chooses to look up the original opening lines; however, the more important point is that not that viewers do not place high value on the actual text being used in these instances but instead that producers have specific intentions for using this feature in their films. Leitch explains:

"[T]he true story" each of these films invokes is textualized precisely by being invoked. After all, a true story is both more and less than the truth: less because it is only a selection of the truth, more because it has already been constructed as a story. Labeling a film as based on a true story identifies its source as a text already concretized as a preconstituted narrative or, more accurately, imputes that its source is a narrative that is constituted only through the act of invoking it." (*Film Adaptations and Its Discontents* 289-290)

The role of fictionalized text in these films, including *Jane Eyre*, is confirming the reality that all stories are constructed in an intertextual environment, whether it is Charlotte Brontë writing her novel in 1847 or it is John Brougham penning his play in 1849 or it is Stevenson directing his screenwriters in the screenplay writing process in 1943.

There are narrative, economic, and artistic reasons for using this alternative text to open the *Jane Eyre* movie. According to Jeffrey Sconce, the decidedly different text shown in the

movie “invoke[s] the cultural capital of *Jane Eyre* as novel and legitimate[s] the interpretive authority of the film’s adaptation” by using the phantom page of text as an intentional act of literary back-formation on a textual image (53). In addition, the printed page helps condense a large amount of the storyline, saving screen time as well as studio resources – fulfilling dual narrative and economic imperatives. For example, the significance of the red room scene is replaced with just one statement in the invented text: “I don’t remember her ever speaking one kind word to me,” followed by a picture of Jane locked in a small room or closet. The printed word shown on screen also helps guide the viewers to interpret later characters and themes, reminding the viewers with other invented passages appearing later in the film that key themes of this story are the plight of the working classes, loneliness, charity, and religious bigotry. In addition, the printed word framed subsequent introductions of Brocklehurst, Helen, and Rivers, giving us important background information for these characters. Multiple purposes are accomplished every time printed word is shown on the screen: “the viewer simultaneously received a reminder that the story was ‘literature,’ a compact bundle of narrative information, and a strategy for ‘reading’ the film” (Sconce 53). The invented text at the beginning of *Jane Eyre* is able to serve multiple purposes at the same time, including intertextual, narrative, economic, and artistic reasons.

*How Film Styles from Different Eras Impacted Jane’s Story: What is Popular Today Will Not Be Popular Tomorrow*

Films from different eras of the twentieth century had different social, political, moral, and legal considerations that influenced the resulting products. Because *Jane Eyre* was produced many times throughout the twentieth century, it is interesting to look how film styles and

conventions of different time periods impacted the story. Hollywood-style adaptations produced during the 1930s and 1940s often took great liberties when adapting literary classics, similar to adaptations made in all times, with no assumption that the book's audience was the same as the film's audience. Naremore reports that producer David Selznick did not have to be concerned about following the exact narrative of the novel *Jane Eyre* when he started to adapt it for the 1943 movie because an audience survey told him that few had ever read the book (11).<sup>xv</sup> Therefore, Selznick and other producers had great freedom in some regards but great restrictions in other aspects.

Even if producers felt free to adapt classics with a limited allegiance to “fidelity discourse” to the source text, there were other pressures on the producers that impinged their freedom in many aspects of the adaptation process: the strict production code imposed on Hollywood from 1930 until 1966 when it was replaced by the current ratings system. The code prohibited nudity, unwarranted violence, slavery of whites, illegal drugs, miscegenation, lustful kissing, suggestive postures, and profanity in films, while also requiring films to encourage the institutions of marriage and home, protect the justice of government, and show religious institutions with respect (Black 1). These regulations impacted the content, essence, feel, and look of Hollywood films for decades. *Love*, a silent version of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, included a drastically different conclusion than the novel as Anna (Greta Garbo) married Vronsky (John Gilbert) in order to comply with the production code (Troost 76). *Jane Eyre* was also impacted; the production code influenced how Rochester's former romantic dalliances were minimized in the 1943 film in order to encourage the institution of marriage for the viewing public.

Many of the characteristics of the early Hollywood-style films are not unique to that time period. Class problems are often defused in these films, likely to reduce political or social criticism or boycotting of the film. As was the case for nineteenth-century melodrama, musical scores also are very important in directing the viewer in how to interpret a scene or character and to project emotion throughout films. The fantasy evoked in many of these films is not the fantasy associated with the actual time period depicted, but rather a fantasy unique to the period of production. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, star power was central to these Hollywood-style movies (Troost 77-78). Many of these general characteristics of film during the 1930s and 1940s are true of nineteenth-century plays as well as films today, but there are several specific genres of film unique to that time period that *Jane Eyre* (1943) could arguably fit into, including the *film noir* phenomenon and the Gothic romance category.

In stark contrast to the ubiquitous storytelling tradition of concluding with a happy ending and the restoration of the social status quo, *film noir* cinema of the 1940s and 1950s filled a different niche, catering to a distinct taste and at times to a different audience. In contrast to the “happy ending” that some filmmakers assumed all Hollywood customers desired, *film noir* films explored the darkness of American life, including the grotesque underside of society, and resisted the obligation of poetic justice (Palmer 264-265). Although not an official production category until the Hollywood Renaissance of the early 1970s, film historians look back at films in the 1940s and 1950s and can definitively identify *film noir* characteristics that film producers and directors utilized even if the term was unused at that time period (Palmer 268). Though there is certainly a happy ending in the 1943 *Jane Eyre* adaptation, it meets many of the other requirements of a *film noir* drama of this era by the inclusion of evil in early scenes at the Reed House and at Lowood and the portrayal of the dominant/submissive romantic relationship

between Rochester and Jane. Evil is shown in terms of the monstrous Reed family and the vulnerability of small Jane through high and low camera angles. Mrs. Reed and John menace over Jane in the Red Room, showing her utter defenselessness. Despite the marriage at the end of the movie, there are elements of dominance/subservience in the romantic relationship portrayed between Rochester and Jane, again, especially shown with the extreme camera angles used in the 1943 film.<sup>xvi</sup> Ellis and Kaplan note the linkage of Gothic elements of Brontë's novel to *film noir* by linking the progression of the Gothic revival and romanticism to expressionism which *film noir* draws from for its themes and style, with the line from Brontë's novel to the 1943 film aesthetics reasonably direct (91). Therefore, the characteristics of *film noir* and Gothic romance often overlap.

From 1940 to 1948, almost every Hollywood production company released Gothic romance films, including the movies *Rebecca* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941), and *Gaslight* (1944), and arguably *Jane Eyre* (1943). The general rubric for a Gothic romance is the following: A young inexperienced woman quickly marries an older man to whom she is both attracted and repelled. When they go to the ancestral mansion, the female protagonist goes through a succession of strange happenings that makes her question if the Gothic hero truly loves her or not, with her often suspecting him of ill-doings, especially murder. The story line of *Jane Eyre* easily fits with the typical Gothic romance plot. Diane Waldman identifies ambiguity as the central feature of the Gothics, defining this ambiguity as "the hesitation between two possible interpretations of events by the protagonist and often, in these filmic presentations, by the spectator as well," and both the protagonist and spectator in this case would be female. Waldman goes on to explain that "within a patriarchal culture, then, the resolution of the hesitation carries with it the ideological function of validation or invalidation of feminine experience" (31). The presence of Bertha in the

attic is one example of this Gothic ambiguity shown in the 1943 *Jane Eyre* film; it is not entirely clear who she is or why she is in the attic or what connection she has with the world downstairs. The interpretation of Bertha's existence and treatment will drastically impact both Rochester's and Jane's lives, determining if Jane will or will not marry Rochester. A similar uncertainty and ambiguity felt by women as the second World War drew to an end, drastically disrupting many of their lives, caused Gothic films, including *Jane Eyre*, to resonate deeply for many women in the cinema audience.

Gothic literature historically had been especially popular with women, so it was no surprise that filmmakers of this era wanted to capitalize on this popularity because many in the film industry in the 1940s thought their audiences mainly consisted of women. Even though historically the Gothic genre has legitimized the expression of feminine fear, anger, and misgivings with the patriarchal order of society, the Gothic romance films of the 1940s typically placed a greater emphasis on the declaration of feminine perception, elucidation, and a shared experience (Waldman 29-31). Interestingly, despite the resonance that many women felt with regards to the Gothic romances, some of the more subversive elements of the Gothic were erased from the films these women viewed in the 1940s. This is also true in *Jane Eyre*, with its emphasis on Jane's sensitivity and passivity rather than her fear or anger.

Films produced during the "New Hollywood" time, late 1960s through the 1970s, generally are influenced by the intensity from the social movements, crises, and changes that rocked American society during this time period. Films made in the "New Hollywood" time pushed back many of the boundaries of society, including political, aesthetic, and economic restrictions. Politically taboo topics and views were shown in films such as *Medium Cool* (1969) and *Chinatown* (1974), while realist representation was replaced with self-reflexive aesthetics in

films ranging from *David Holzman's Diary* (1967) to *The Last Movie* (1971). Similarly, economic boundaries were shifting as producers tried to detach themselves from the conventional industrial film production process by forming groups and by the cultivation of auteur personalities, such as John Cassavetes and Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope and the BBS group which produced films like *Drive, He Said* (1971) for Columbia (Elsaesser, Horwath, and King 11-12). It is important to note that during the more experimental period of filmmaking of the 1960s and 1970s, there were many fewer cinematic adaptations of nineteenth-century novels, though *Jane Eyre* was one of the chosen few that was adapted during this time; however, as would be expected, this adaptation looks very different from Stevenson's film produced years earlier.

If the Gothic elements of the story were accentuated in the 1943 film because of the film trends of the 1940s, it could equally be said that the film environment of 1970s influenced many aspects of the 1970 *Jane Eyre* film. Gothicism was no longer in vogue, but the political climate in America certainly was influential in Hollywood decision-making. With a new wave of feminists active politically, inevitably this would influence filmmaking; both the characters and visual aesthetics of this film were influenced.

The characters of the 1970 *Jane Eyre* are more psychologically identifiable to mid- and late-twentieth century viewers, with many of the elements of a Gothic romance scrubbed from this film. Rochester and Bertha are humanized in the 1970 film and much of the conflict between Jane and Rochester is softened here. Rochester is a tired, almost elderly man who seems worn out from his life of pleasure. His character is both humane and sympathetic, with no domineering characteristics. He appears to be genuinely distressed by Bertha's condition, and in this adaptation we are allowed to meet Bertha and see her prison to a much greater extent. Bertha

similarly is humanized; instead of being described as violent and “unchaste” (as in the novel), here she is beautiful though catatonic, obviously mentally ill but not raving mad. The touching scene with only Rochester and Bertha in the attic emphasizes his loneliness and her total isolation, creating sympathy for both characters.

Similarly, the Gothic aesthetic of the 1943 film is replaced by a more realistic setting with recognizable set designs full of lush green plants and lots of light in the 1970 film. There is more light and sunshine than darkness and menacing clouds in this adaptation. Thornfield is not a Gothic castle but instead an elegant mansion containing beautiful furniture and a stunning staircase. When Jane and Rochester are reunited at the end of the film at Ferndean, the home is shown as a place of quiet and peace, full of new life. Even the scenery and setting has been sanitized and cleaned up in the 1970 film.

The heritage movement in films came into full swing by the mid-1980s, just in time to influence several *Jane Eyre* adaptations produced in the 1990s. Quality costume drama, also known as heritage films, revitalized cinema in Britain, including a large number of adaptations of Shakespeare, Austen, and James but also describing a great number of other films produced during that time period. The definition of a heritage film is not hard-and-fast nor does everyone agree on what exactly that definition entails; however, according to Andrew Higson, in his book *English Heritage, English Cinema*, heritage films share some general characteristics that can distinguish them from other films of the same time period or from earlier time periods. These films often prominently feature subject matter that has historically played a large part in determining English heritage and identity. These dramas set in the past frequently involve a story of appropriate etiquettes and proprieties, but also a transgressive romantic relationship that involves upper- and upper middle-class Englishmen, all set with a backdrop of a luxurious

country home, with scenic landscapes, in period costumes, and often with canonical literary allusions (Higson 1). It quickly is clear that *Jane Eyre*'s narrative is a perfect fit for these general characteristics of heritage films.

The female audience has been critical to these films' successes, often appealing to many of these viewers by featuring a female protagonist in their films, often even in the title of their film, including *Emma*, *Lady Jane*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Tess*, *Elizabeth*, and, most important for this project, *Jane Eyre* (Higson 23). Most of these movies contain a love story, which again might appeal to a more female audience, but does not contain the melodramatic emotions sometimes a part of romance stories. Instead these heritage films underplay displays of emotion, with sensationalism tastefully obscured. Richard Dreyer and other scholars argue that this understatement of emotion does not necessarily signify a lack of passion as desire can be portrayed in a variety of ways other than physicality shown on the screen. It also could be said that the representation of emotional repression, often associated with Victorian values, can be a very poignant experience in itself, shedding light on the problems with this type of inhibited interaction as well (Higson 40). Though the definition of a heritage film is fluid and is not the same for every scholar, these general characteristics are associated with most films categorized as heritage films from the 1980s and 1990s.

In the 1996 film, Jane is a traditional female protagonist who has a romantic relationship with an upper-class Englishman with a backdrop of a luxurious country home with underplayed displays of emotions – fulfilling all the general characteristics for a heritage film. Therefore, it is not surprising that there were several adaptations of Brontë's text during this time period. It could be argued that *Jane Eyre* film adaptations from this time, including Zeffirelli's production, also could be categorized as romance films. However, I agree with Higson that the same film can

circulate among different audiences and in different contexts either emphasizing the romantic image of the film or the elements of heritage culture (76), both which are present in Zeffirelli's film, for the categories of a romance movie and a heritage film are not mutually exclusive.

As might be expected, there are drastically different arguments made concerning these heritage films, ranging from conservatives heralding the films for upholding traditional values to liberals accusing the films of propagating "body-hating" by using the straight-laced Victorian dress to some feminists criticizing the films as anti-women while other feminists declaring the same films anti-men (Higson 37-41). These dramas have been proclaimed as paragons of a conservative version of a national English heritage; similarly, the same dramas have also been interpreted as critiquing heritage Englishness.

Those film critics that see these films as criticizing traditional English values point to the fact that many of the directors of these films are in fact foreigners, including *Jane Eyre* and *Tea with Mussolini* (directed by Italian Franco Zeffirelli), *Sense and Sensibility* (directed by Taiwanese Ang Lee), *Mrs Dalloway* (directed by Dutch Marleen Gorris), among many others, which perhaps gave them the ability to approach the subject of "Englishness" from a less deferential place, as an outsider than an insider (Higson 29). Obviously, there are many English directors as well, both those who produce movies that are proclaimed as critical of the problems in the English past as well as those who produce movies heralded as affirming a nostalgic and celebratory version of the English past, so the nationality of the filmmaker cannot be listed as a deciding factor but perhaps a contributing influence.

Some critics from a leftist perspective dismiss heritage films on class grounds, asserting that they are conservative dramas intended for middle-class audiences that function to maintain the values associated with the most privileged in society, while others disdain them based on

sexual and gender politics or because of how England's history has been portrayed on the screen. The rise in the British tourist industry associated with visiting heritage sites muddies the water for some in terms of the motives behind the dramas, as a large amount of money is associated with this tourism industry (Higson 47-49). Alison Light provides an opposing argument, in support of heritage films, that they put forth a visualization of liberal-humanist ideals in a grasping, money-oriented world, a "romantic longing within liberalism for making unions despite differences in nationality, sexuality, social class" (qtd. in Higson 72). The ambivalence and ambiguity in interpretation of these films, whether in relation to morality, Englishness, femininity, or sexuality, create room for many productive debates on these issues.

These movies often are ambivalent enough to be read in a variety of ways, and perhaps Higson is correct in his conclusion that the films are actually structured in this way so as to encourage conflicting readings from various audiences. Higson describes a number of competing elements common to heritage films, including a dichotomy between narrative and image and a struggle in how private and public space is appropriated in terms of a conflicting sense of the intimate and the epic. He proposes that many of the narratives in heritage films present a version of England that is unpredictable and at risk, with repressive social and cultural customs, and privilege is shown to actually be exploitative at its core; however, the images in the film paint a different picture, with England shown as a desirable place to live, full of nostalgic traditions.

The dichotomy in the representation of wealth on screen often is glaring: the narratives often critique privilege and encourage cultural fluidity and change, while the visuality of the films give a different message, one of sentimental enchantment in images of wealth and relics. Similarly, there is a conflicting portrayal of private and public space, in terms of the local and the national, and some refer to these films as "intimate epics" for this exact reason. Though these are

often intimate films about personal relationships, especially romantic relationships, on the other hand, they are at the same time films that deal with the approved, public space of national history as the characters follow the conduct associated with respectability and public image. Similarly, this dichotomy of the intimate and the epics is also played out in the locality itself. There is the intimate, regional location of semi-rural southern England in most of the heritage films, but, at the same time, there is the epic, hegemonic regionalism of English history also central to many of these films, so the “South Country” becomes the nation in a sense (Higson 77-79). The tension of which competing story to believe, the narrative or the image track of these films, is played out in critic’s opinions but ultimately might remain inconclusive.

Just as different film styles and conventions from different time periods impacted these three *Jane Eyre* films produced in the twentieth century, so too did a variety of cultural, political, social, and legal considerations impact Charlotte Brontë as she wrote this novel as well as influence playwrights in the nineteenth century who adapted her narrative. The intersectional representation of race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability, albeit in an arguably imperfect capacity, present in *Jane Eyre* the novel, appeared to be ahead of its time in terms of the adaptations of the text. Each of the dramatic adaptations on the stage from the nineteenth-century tend to latch onto one specific element of differentiation, such as class or gender, and focus on that in exclusion to other possible modes of exploration. Similarly, the twentieth-century film adaptations of *Jane Eyre* also focus on one element of differentiation from the novel, but in these three cases, where the romantic plot is emphasized, gender and sexuality are principally explored, leaving scholars to go back to Brontë’s novel to think about possible implications involving race, disability, and class.

During the almost 170 years since the novel *Jane Eyre* was published, there have been numerous adaptations in many different mediums and genres. This thesis explored how literary criticism itself has adapted a more straight-forward, “simplistic” feminist reading of the text to include and acknowledge issues related to intersectionality and postcolonialism as well as race and disability studies. The nineteenth-century stage adaptations chose to ignore the more overt feminist propensities in the source text and instead focused on class struggle or more benign gender relations. The twentieth-century film adaptations concentrated on the romance plot between Jane and Rochester, though more and less feministic inclinations were included, at least partly due to the decade in which it was produced and released. In 1881 Peter Bayne wrote that Charlotte Brontë “has won for herself a place in our literature from which she cannot be deposed. Her influence will long be felt, as a strong plastic energy, in the literature of Britain and the world. The language of England will retain a trace of her genius” (Allott 326). Bayne was certainly correct, though I doubt he had an inclination of how much impact *Jane Eyre* would continue to have even so many years after it was published, evidenced by the numerous adaptations in existence and the many more that are sure to come.

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## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> See *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*. Ed. Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007, for descriptions and analysis of many of the adaptations in various genres.
- <sup>ii</sup> See *The Madwoman and the Blindman: Jane Eyre, Discourse, Disability*. Ed. Bolt, David, Julia Miele Rodas, and Elizabeth Donaldson. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2012, for more on disability studies in relation to *Jane Eyre*.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Jane Eyre* (1910) directed by Theodore Marston, *Jane Eyre* (1914) directed by Frank Hall Crane, *Jane Eyre* (1914) directed by Martin Faust, *Jane Eyre* (1915) directed by Travers Vale, *Woman and Wife* (1918) directed by Edward José, and *Jane Eyre* (1921) directed by Hugo Ballin
- <sup>iv</sup> See Bortolotti and Hutcheon's 2007 article "On the origin of adaptations: Rethinking fidelity discourse and 'success' – Biologically." in *New Literary History* 38: 443-458.
- <sup>v</sup> The French Revolution occurred in France from 1789 until 1799 and was a time of social and political upheaval. This unrest continued throughout the nineteenth century, with the July Revolution (1830) and the February Revolution (1848).
- <sup>vi</sup> See Richard Chase's article "Brontës: or, Myth Domesticated" in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. William O'Connor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948. 1, 2-13, where the issue was originally defined. Also see Adrienne Rich's work "Jane Eyre: The Temptation of a Motherless Woman," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979. 89-106.
- <sup>vii</sup> Vlock's work primarily focuses on the novels of Dickens, but many of the principles that apply to Dickens also are applicable to Charlotte Brontë as well. Dickens was more cosmopolitan, frequently travelling, and also experiencing many more years of life as compared with Brontë's short life. However, though Brontë spent the majority of her 38 years in or nearby Haworth, she also took two trips to Brussels, once to attend boarding school and once to teach, in the early 1840s. Therefore, though she might not have been as cosmopolitan as Dickens or as directly exposed to the theater, she nonetheless likely had some exposure in Brussels as well as when traveling to London. Also, it is well known that all the Brontës were well-read, so it is very likely that Charlotte Brontë was very familiar with common theater practices of Victorian England from newspapers or scholarly works.
- <sup>viii</sup> In *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre*, Vlock also includes a discussion about Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette*, using it as another example of a theatrical novel as it includes spectacular storms, dangerous villainesses, haunted nuns, shipwrecks, mental illnesses, and emotionally charged language (p. 63-64).
- <sup>ix</sup> The hero is an attractive young man full of bravery and devotion to his sweetheart or wife, and he typically encounters a villain in defense of the heroine, but often he is muddled and gullible in his plans. The villain, often the more moving force of melodrama, is a purposeful character who thinks and plans before acting to extract revenge on the hero or acquire the hero's money and property. The heroine is at the heart of melodrama, and a desire for her typically causes the hero to set the series of melodramatic events in motion, as her separation from the hero is almost always necessary in the beginning of a melodrama. The function of the characters of the old man and woman in a melodrama is lamentation, for often their only role is to bemoan the evil of today and reminisce about the former days of happiness that are now gone forever. A comic man or woman (or often a comic couple) provides humorous relief and also often aids the

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hero in his battle against villainy, as the comic man often is better suited than the hero to combat the villain. Many theaters kept a stock company of actors, one for each of the aforementioned characters, which also standardized the roles of the play. This led to repetitive stories and characters but also aided the writer in his or her need for quickly writing plays without a lot of detail needed for each character. See Michael Booth's book *English Melodrama* for more information on this topic.

<sup>x</sup> If the ending of *Jane Eyre* is too formulaic for some, the culmination of Brontë's 1853 novel *Villette* provides a more subversive conclusion, as the female protagonist Lucy Snowe does not marry in the end; instead her intended is presumed dead at sea, leaving her free from any of the entanglements of marriage.

<sup>xi</sup> See *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen* (1994), edited by Bratton, Cook, and Gledhill, for a wide range of essays on this topic.

<sup>xii</sup> Some twentieth-century stage productions include: *Jane Eyre* produced by Miron Leffingwell (1909), *Jane Eyre* produced by Percy Haswell (1914), *The Master of Thornfield* produced by Rose Bachelis Shomer and Miriam Shomer-Zunser (192?), *Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë: A Dramatisation in Three Acts* produced by Marjorie Chalmers Carleton (1936), *Jane Eyre: A Drama of Passion* produced by Helen Jerome (1936), *Jane Eyre* produced by Huntingdon Hartford (1956), *Jane Eyre* produced by Brian Tyler (1964), *Jane Eyre* produced by John Cannon (1973), *Jane Eyre* produced by Christopher Maritn (1983), and *Jane Eyre* produced by Willis Hall (1992). For a complete list of twentieth-century stage productions, see Patsy Stoneman's *Brontë Transformations* (1996).

<sup>xiii</sup> The term "heritage films" is used to describe a cluster of late twentieth-century British films that depicted the England of past decades and centuries in a nostalgic manner.

<sup>xiv</sup> The novel *The Eyre Affair: A Thursday Next Novel* by Jasper Fforde does provide an alternative ending, with Jane marrying St. John. However, the literary detective Thursday Next fixes this problem eventually, with Jane marrying Rochester instead, as the readers had always desired.

<sup>xv</sup> Selznick did not end up producing *Jane Eyre*, even though he began production work on the movie. On November 18, 1942, Selznick sold the *Jane Eyre* project, with *Claudia* (1943) and *Keys to the Kingdom* (1944), to 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox to free studio resources for his melodrama, *Since You Went Away* (1944). This deal included the script, the services of Houseman, Stevenson, Huxley, and Joan Fontaine on the *Jane Eyre* production.

<sup>xvi</sup> See Dianne Sadoff's book *Victorian Vogue: British Novels on Screen*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, for more on this topic.