

**Dislocated Heroines:  
Cary Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*,  
Romantic Love and Bertha's Legacy**

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the 2011 Focus Features film adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre* directed by Cary Fukunaga. Like other modern adaptations of nineteenth-century women's writing, Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre* privileges heteronormative love for subject completion, belying his claim that this adaptation is both more accurate and less about period romance. Fukunaga's representation of Jane juxtaposes her 'complete' subjecthood prior to the beginning of the film with Bertha Mason's 'lack' of complete subjectivity. Ultimately, this essay gestures towards a problematic of twenty-first century adaptations of classic romance novels and their representation of the heroine as needing love to alleviate her dislocation from the modern world.

**Keywords:** Bertha Mason, Charlotte Brontë, film adaptation, gender, heteronormativity, *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Jane Eyre* (2011), proto-feminism, romance, subjectivity.

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From 2000 to the present, adaptors of Victorian novels, especially those written by women, have privileged the love story but with a surprising twist: these films foreground heteronormative love in order to argue that modern women require an appropriate male partner to 'complete' them as gendered political subjects. This is accomplished through a 'Victorian' lens: historically, this oeuvre tells its predominantly female audience, even 'autonomous' women want love to secure their radical independence. In other words, these films let the viewer know that the independent women of yesterday secured present-day female viewers the 'right' to love and companionate marriage. If the romance plot can no longer entice viewers with its biological determinism (women must marry in order to have children, but love gives them the drive to do so), then some other motivation must be used to secure the value of this form of love. Thus, filmmakers post-1980 tend to concentrate on the loveless life as an incomplete one.<sup>1</sup> This turn secures ideological complicity through spectatorial fantasy for the modern female viewer.

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Director Cary Fukunaga's 2011 adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, however, presents the viewer with a sharper departure from this millennial-period model than appears at first glance. In his adaptation, the narrative begins with Jane as an adult, rather than as a child, thus disrupting the structure of the Victorian female *Bildungsroman*. The film opens with a panoramic shot of a weeping Jane Eyre (played by Mia Wasikowska) alone on the expansive and isolated moors. She wanders in the rain and wind for a long time before collapsing at the door of the Rivers family. Since this moment occurs rather late in the novel, Fukunaga's adaptation must at first be told through flashbacks, and Jane begins her narrative as an adult subject, rather than a child striving towards self-authorisation and social recognition as in Brontë's novel. Instead of Jane reaching subjecthood through repeated suffering, she is portrayed as always-already a subject, unique in her ability to know and articulate her desires.<sup>2</sup> Through this narrative of unique identity, which Fukunaga styled as Jane's "uncompromising convictions", the director's representation de-historicises Victorian gender and power dynamics (Fukunaga in [Anon.] 2011b: 1:02-1:04). Jane 'rises above' these restrictive institutions, because she has a singular power to do so; other nineteenth-century British women failed to do so, because they either accepted their secondary role or had insufficient will or power.

This construction of Jane Eyre as an agent is one common to adaptations of the novel from the 1980s to the present day. Yet Fukunaga's film, in its original approach to Bertha Mason, also examines what have been seen in recent years as the more transgressive aspects of the novel. Jane's construction as an agent parallels Bertha's opposing construction as a non-agent. As a deleted scene from the film makes clear, the film's initial concerns with Victorian subjecthood were much more nuanced than those of the final product that appeared in theaters. This excised scene, which shows Bertha entering Jane's room before the latter's wedding night and destroying her veil, accomplishes three things: first, it cements the eerie connection between Jane and her predecessor, instead of obscuring it through Bertha's ultimate erasure in the film; second, it changes the viewer's perception of both Jane's and Bertha's subjectivity (and by extension, of Victorian female subjecthood) as represented in the film; and, finally, it reveals the tension between the elevation of heteronormativity and Bertha and Rochester's failure to achieve this ideal.

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Fukunaga has repeatedly said in interviews that his *Jane Eyre* was an attempt to show the “darker”, more Gothic side of the novel, an attempt that the director felt aligned with Brontë’s own intentions in writing *Jane Eyre* (Fukunaga in Buchanan 2010: para. 3). If, as Hila Shachar writes, “societies and cultures continually rework certain texts as a collective inheritance” (Shachar 2012: 1), and if Brontë’s novel can be considered one of these texts, then much is at stake in an adaptation that claims to recapture what others have missed. Ironically, however, Fukunaga’s vision for a more ‘Gothic’ adaptation pushes the narrative away from its roots in the female Gothic. For theorists of the Gothic novel, the female Gothic is not only the “writing of excess” (Botting 1996: 1), but also the writing of *female* excess. Female excess encompasses the grotesque female body and the paranoia and hysteria resulting from the physical, emotional, psychological, and political constraints such a body and its interpretation call forth. The Gothic dimensions of the novel reveal the fraught nature of Victorian female subjectivity, and the “shocking intensity with which Jane publicly formulates unladylike eroticism as well as indecorous social resentment” (Gilbert 1998: 357). Part of that formulation occurs directly through the portrayal of Bertha as a foil to Jane. Fukunaga’s adaptation articulates the tension between female desire and social decorum most glaringly when the deleted scene is taken into account. His representation of Bertha rending the veil demonstrates that while Jane finds her ‘appropriate’ mate in Rochester, she may yet share the same fate as her predecessor, a paradox that affords evidence for the hystericisation of the text.

In her book *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Anne Williams argues that the contrast between the gaze as understanding and realisation in the male and female Gothic can be articulated as follows: in the male Gothic, the hero/villain’s gaze in relation to his identity is the realisation of “a necessarily guilty desire, a transgression against the divine principle that flesh, especially female flesh, is a snare and a delusion” (Williams 1995: 145). “In the context of the Female Gothic, however,” Williams continues,

to gaze becomes a creative rather than a destructive act. In “realizing” things or persons other than herself the heroine literally “makes them real.” Her perception enlarges her world, opens up the possibility of discovering good, and of

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finding what she seeks. For the Gothic heroine, this object is chiefly love. (Williams 1995: 145)

Similarly, Diane Long Hoeveler demonstrates that the female Gothic author's motivation is "nothing less than the fictional feminization of the masculine world, the domestication of all those masculine institutions that exist to define the sexuality, not to mention the sanity, of women" (Hoeveler 1998: xiii). These masculine institutions, according to Hoeveler, "can be brought to heel, punished, and contained within the confines of the ultimate fantasy home – the female-domesticated companionate marriage" (Hoeveler 1998: xiv). Williams and Hoeveler's descriptions of the female Gothic accurately describe the novel *Jane Eyre*, but Fukunaga's adaptation privileges fear only, without exploring what it is that Jane fears so acutely. While the female Gothic certainly moves towards the idealised, or at least somewhat equal, marriage that implicitly concludes Fukunaga's film, the way that the director represents Jane's subjectivity is more often through the lens of lost or thwarted love than the lens of suffering at the hands of the masculine institutions that repress Jane and women in her position.

Fukunaga's representation de-emphasises the social and political frameworks that Brontë argues repress her heroine. This rewriting belittles the struggles of Victorian women, while focusing the narrative on the 'reward' of marriage. Deirdre David explores the nuances of Jane's subjectivity in the novel by arguing that

Jane is an adept discursive participant in Victorian justification of the British control, education, and reformation of subjugated peoples. But as much as she is the subject of her own narrative (the disciplinary governess), she is also necessarily an object in that narrative (the disciplined governess). As object, she is constructed by the political enterprise to which she contributes, that of defining British national identity through possession of empire, and by the patriarchal undertaking in which she is necessarily an accomplice, that of constituting Victorian manhood. (David 1995: 78-79)

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David's discussion of Jane's subjectivity points out the discursive frames that situate Jane within the nineteenth-century rhetorics of empire, gender, class, race, and subjecthood. Because Fukunaga's adaptation conveniently sets Jane up as romantic heroine only, the complex power relations of the novel become mere hindrances in the coupling of Rochester and Jane rather than representations of the problematic relationship between Victorian feminine and masculine subjectivity or between British and colonial female subjectivity in the nineteenth century. In other words, romantic love obscures both Jane's position as imperial subject and her submission as gendered object, eliding their inherent difference under the false prize of attaining a mate.

In order to make sense of Fukunaga's place in the larger body of *Jane* adaptations, I want to first foreground what I see as the three periods of film adaptation for Brontë's novel with three representative examples. The divisions I construct here attempt to make sense of how the novel has been understood, the gendered subjectivity that each period seeks to enforce, and the differing representations of Jane, Bertha, and heteronormative love at each moment of film adaptation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The adaptations of these periods all attempt to address, enforce, and critique the dominant gender ideology of the novel and its time period, and of the contemporary moment. I divide the periods as follows: the first progresses from the beginning of film to the 1940s; the second forms the heyday of new adaptations from the BBC from the 1980s to the 1990s; and the third covers the millennial period from 2000 to the present.<sup>3</sup> I see Robert Stevenson's 1944 film starring Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine as the representative adaptation of the first period.<sup>4</sup> The second film I focus on is the 1996 Franco Zeffirelli film. In the third period of adaptation I examine the recent (2006) adaptation of the novel by director Susanna White, starring Ruth Wilson. These films will allow me to make sense of the legacy of *Jane Eyre* adaptations and perspectives on the novel under which Fukunaga is working, and the way he himself has interpreted Brontë's text.

Because all adaptations re-imagine a text for a new audience, the films I will examine are representative of three different periods in nineteenth-century novel adaptation simply by virtue of re-understanding the text's place in contemporary society. Most theorists of film adaptation and 'afterlives' agree on this point. Dianne Sadoff and John Kucich, for

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example, write that the Victorian era is often conceived in these films as “historically central to late-century postmodern consciousness” (Sadoff and Kucich 2000: xi). Similarly, Rachel Carroll writes, “[a]ll adaptations express or address a desire to return to an ‘original’ textual encounter; as such, adaptations are perhaps symptomatic of a cultural compulsion to repeat” (Carroll 2009: 1). Carroll adds, however, that adaptations are always interpretations, no matter how faithful they attempt to be, and thus, “every adaptation is an instance of textual *infidelity*” (Carroll 2009: 1; original emphasis). For Brontë’s novel, the screenwriter and director’s desire to revisit the place of classic texts in the modern era often means that the author, as well as the characters, are re-imagined as constituting a determined part of the historical past, wherein women’s bodies are over-emphasised and over-represented, and biological roles become the main criteria for successful individualism. Rather than a nuanced approach to historical gender roles, adaptors attempt to find an easily digestible version of the Victorian era – one which viewers can quickly and simply make sense of and from which they can easily distinguish themselves and their time period. As Christian Gutleben writes of historical fiction set in the nineteenth century, these novels

insist on denouncing and condemning the social and sexual injustices of the Victorian era, thus explicitly taking a critical stance towards its depicted world [...]. Again and again one finds in neo-Victorian novels clear expressions of indignation about women’s lot at the time of England’s great empire. (Gutleben 2001: 121-122)

Adaptations, especially of the Brontë sisters’ texts, tend to privilege the lead female as an exception to her era, the kind of ‘modern’ woman who made women’s improved positions possible.

All three films imagine the opening of the text in very different ways, in particular, Jane’s understanding of herself as a subject and her recognition of her place in the world. The differences in the films’ opening moments also illuminate perceptions of gender and subjectivity in each period of adaptation. I have already discussed the opening of Fukunaga’s film, and that description will serve as a comparison with the other three discussed below. As stated earlier, the 2011 film begins with Jane as an adult rather than a child, and as such assumes that she is always-already a

subject. If the novel asks the reader to imagine that Jane's 'quest' is for her own self-affirmation, then Fukunaga's film, in contrast, asks the viewer to imagine that Jane's search is for love, or self-affirmation through another. In effect, the 2011 film creates Jane as the self-assured and independent modern female lead: rather than figuring her as a Christian heroine who must suffer through trials in order to attain self-knowledge as Brontë does, Fukunaga figures her as a unique individual searching for the ideal partner to recognise and respond to a self-conception that already exists. As the film's structure shows, Jane is independent and self-sufficient. The Romantic opening, with the heroine the unique individual alone on the moors, contrasts with Jane's need for the kindness and care of the Rivers family. Throughout, this parallel structure – independence juxtaposed with the desire for familial and romantic love – reinforces Jane's pre-constructed subjectivity, but makes clear that even unique individuals require a certain element of human connection.

An interview with the director and lead actors of the 2011 *Jane Eyre* seems to demonstrate the purpose of this structure in Fukunaga's film. The director tells his interviewer that there

are these young women who are looking for companionship or looking for family, and [...] there's something, I think, universal about that search, of trying to find people who understand who you are. You're no longer isolated, sort of, in this lonely world. And, um, I think that's what Jane is. (Fukunaga in [Anon.] 2011b: 1:57-2:13)

According to Mia Wasikowska, who plays Jane, wearing a corset gave her "a sense – instantly – of [...] the restriction and repression of that time", which she describes as not just part of the gender norms of the era, but of the lack of connection and love "in quite a dislocated world" (Wasikowska in [Anon.] 2011c: 2:37-2:42, 0:29-0:31). Gender ideology is, of course, part of the 'dislocation' Jane feels, but, more than anything, the latter comes from being unloved, a 'fact' that will be rehearsed in the Fontaine, Gainsborough, and Wilson portrayals of Jane. Although Jane is one of the many 'restricted' and 'repressed' women of her "dislocated world", she still manages to rise above the nineteenth-century strictures that bind her. And instead of "[bringing] to heel" the masculine world that oppresses her and

finding solace in the companionate marriage that gives her a husband and a child, as in the novel, the film abruptly ends with Jane and Rochester embracing. Nonetheless, Fukunaga's attempts to both universalise and, by contrast, individualise Jane by grounding self-actualisation in the heteronormative romance quest still ends up subscribing to the "deeply conservative politics" of other adaptations that naturalise women's roles within the home (Shachar 2012: 114).

In Robert Stevenson's 1944 film Jane must harness her own individual will for the greater good of the nation by learning to curb her passions and be submissive to a 'deserving' man. The heroine begins as a willful and defiant child cast out without protection, a reference perhaps to wartime orphanhood and the individual's place in the nation. Unlike the ambivalent tension of the novel, which pits "its patriarchal love fantasy" against "an equally passionate protest against patriarchal authority," the 1944 *Jane* denies the validity of Jane's protest, and upholds the love fantasy (Wyatt 1985: 200). The opening lines betray the kind of defiance supposedly characteristic of the novel's heroine, a defiance that must be rooted out so she may become a 'proper' member of English society. The film opens with the 'text' of *Jane Eyre*, or so a viewer unfamiliar with the novel might imagine; i.e., it opens, in a trope common to many adaptations, especially of fairy tales, with a leather-bound text opened by a bodiless hand. We see the title page and then a voiceover 'reads' from the open book:

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, 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 (Stevenson 1944: 1:35-1:54).

The passage juxtaposes autobiographical details with declarative sentences on the political climate of England. It is meant to evoke sympathy for Jane who is one of the "unfortunate poor" without "money" or "position". Yet



what it ultimately does is alienate the reader from the defiant Jane, who is not only unloved, but has no love for those around her. Jane must be made submissive, yet still have some independent thoughts. Otherwise her mid-century female viewers may not identify with her. At this point in the story Jane is, in fact, as 'bodiless' as the hand that opens the book of her life. She has no "proper place" as a subject in the outside world until she establishes filial and romantic connections with others. The time period Fontaine-as-Jane describes is also dislocated from the viewer. The impression is that there was "harsh [...] change", "cold and disagreeable" charity, and religious "bigotry and cruelty" at *that* time, not this present moment. Simultaneously, however, the viewer may associate the harsh changes of the Victorian Era represented on screen with parallel changes in the nation at war. Similar to the early to mid-nineteenth century, the film demonstrates, when a 'unique' individual had to rise above the class restrictions of a more narrow-minded British world, the individual of the 1940s had to manage the particular constraints of the British nation during wartime.

The task of Stevenson's adaptation, however, is not to fan the flame of rebellion in the (1940s American or British) female viewer, but rather to allow her to recognise her own desire for individualism through romantic love, a union that will regenerate and repopulate a devastated nation. As the film progresses we see that Jane is 'just like us': white, educated, and with avenues to social mobility. Her place, like the imagined audience, was as an 'equal' to her partner, or at least equal in the sense of participating in a reciprocal romantic union requiring that each member of the partnership fulfill his/her appointed role. Sadoff writes of the 1940s Brontë films (*Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*) that they

trim events in their source novels' plots through narrative transfer of strictly selected cardinal functions to feature the romantic couple; claiming fidelity to the romance plot even as they prune its seeming illogic, these films indulge spectatorial fantasy yet inoculate against its dangerous passion. (Sadoff 2010: 50)

The domestic values and the 'taint' of the public sphere so often contrasted in the nineteenth-century novel here act as historical predecessors to the twentieth-century moment. The 1944 *Jane Eyre* exploits the sexual fantasy

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of Brontë's novel and "invok[es] the 'twisted passion'" interpreted as inherent in the text (Sadoff 2010: 83), while ultimately domesticating the revolutionary Jane and her sadistic and tortured Rochester. In other words, the novel's proto-feminism and implicit female sexual desire, already noticed by nineteenth-century reviewers well before the first film adaptation was produced in 1910, are "erased" in the 1940s versions (Brosh 2008: 46), even as the adaptations allow the viewer to temporarily participate in the romantic fantasy of unrestrained desire.

Although the 1996 Franco Zeffirelli adaptation attempts to address some of the more 'radical' moments in *Jane Eyre*, its desire to circumscribe the plot within the genre of romance essentially serves the same function as the 1944 adaptation. Love – romantic or otherwise – again emerges as the quintessential requirement for complete female selfhood. As such, Jane can be a woman of independent means, but she must return to share her wealth with Rochester. Of course, a woman of the 1990s would not necessarily identify with a heroine whose main drives were marriage and procreation, and thus Jane's drive becomes more about love and less about the products of her union with Rochester. Sarah Mead-Willis concisely summarises the issues of the 1990s adaptations:

The versions of *Jane Eyre* made during the political correctness craze of the 1990s take a particularly revisionist tack with Brontë's text, purging the narrative of elements that might grate too harshly against the ideological sensibilities of a contemporary audience. (Mead-Willis 2010: 34)

In the Zeffirelli adaptation, the audience's perception of *Jane Eyre* moves towards the changes made in the millennial period of *Jane Eyre* adaptation. For Zeffirelli, Jane is a gendered subject who must navigate her place in a classed and gendered world. Combining the "paper-back romance" of the 1940s with the tenets of women's liberation movements (Gilbert 1998: 369), the 1996 *Jane* focuses on the dislocation and displacement of the female protagonist in the emerging modern world. As such, Zeffirelli's film begins to move towards what Julie Sanders calls "appropriation", the aim of which is "to recreate and refashion a particular literary genre, period, and style", following "a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (Sanders 2006: 123, 26).

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Certainly the events of Zeffirelli's film are the events of Brontë's novel. The hindrances to romantic coupling highlighted in the film, however, are only superficially based in Victorian class and gender hierarchies and actually result from Jane's need for the 'completion' of filial and romantic love. As Liora Brosh explains in *Screening Novel Women*:

During the Depression and the Second World War, British and American adaptations construct women who renounce their own desires for the good of domestic entities, either the private home or the home nation. In contrast, domestic ideals constructed in the 1990s suggest that women can satisfy all their desires, finding erotic fulfillment, happy marriages, and feminist liberation all at once. Thus, although these adaptations differ in terms of their specific characteristics over time, they all attempt to construct gender ideals in terms of contemporary ideas about women and their relationship to a domestic sphere. (Brosh 2008: 3-4)

Adaptation in the 1990s, then, again serves a heteronormative function. The heroine needs the love of the hero in order to 'find' herself. We might argue that the hero also needs to form a couple with the heroine for his own selfhood, but as her viewpoint is that from which the story is most often told, this can also be interpreted as a projection of her own desire.

Charlotte Gainsborough's Jane, unlike the Jane of the Stevenson adaptation, searches for love in general, not necessarily to fulfil a specific female role, but rather for her own selfhood. Compare the beginning of Zeffirelli's adaptation to Stevenson's above: "My parents died when I was very young. I was sent to live with my aunt, Mrs. Reed, and her children at Gateshead Hall. For nearly ten years I endured their unkindness and cruelty. They did not love me. I could not love them" (Zeffirelli 1996: 0:42-1:04). Unlike the shift between Jane's life and the situation in England during the 1820s in Stevenson's adaptation, Zeffirelli's adaptation privileges the 'I'. There is no sense of England's suffering, only Jane's, and what she suffers from is lack of love. Like the many heroes and heroines of that particular decade's children's films, Jane in Zeffirelli's film can be more defiant, more wilful, and more independent. One need only compare the young Jane (Anna Paquin) to characters like Matilda Wormwood or Wednesday Adams.

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Because Jane has a ‘right’ to be wilful – her ‘oppression’ at the hands of her caretaker demands this for the late twentieth-century viewer – her quest for love appears not weak and overly feminine, but her just reward for suffering. Charlotte Brontë, of course, also conceptualises her heroine’s happy marriage with Rochester as a reward, but nevertheless, Zeffirelli’s adaptation de-historicises Brontë’s own worldview in favour of that of the modern audience.

Zeffirelli’s *Jane Eyre*, in particular, seems to free the protagonist from the search for subjectivity in order that she may find the appropriate affiliative love relationship to complete her journey towards selfhood.<sup>5</sup> This may seem contradictory, but to put it another way, Zeffirelli’s Jane, unlike Stevenson’s or even Brontë’s, is not searching for her place in the nation, or her role as a female subject in Victorian England, but the affirmation of herself as a unique individualised subject through marriage to a worthy gentleman. We can credit the adaptations of the 1980s and 1990s with moving us toward a version of Jane so forward-looking and ‘radical’ for her era that she appears not as a quaint relic, but as our own contemporary.

Popular conceptions of feminism in films of the 1990s, not just neo-Victorian adaptations, led to a digestible, and yet ideologically complicit, set of standards within which romantic plots tended to operate. As Liora Brosh writes:

These adaptations [from the 1990s] combined a resistance to dominant cultural constructs of female sexuality with popular feminist ideas. The adaptations of the 1990s almost always ended in happy marriages between liberated women and sexually respectful idealized men, and thus constructed a utopian space in which erotic fulfillment could merge with feminist triumph. They resisted the increasingly sexually invasive mainstream culture while speaking to the absences and gaps of modern life, and in so doing these films offered their predominantly female viewers an imaginary space in which freedom and sexual fulfillment could coexist in perfect marriages. (Brosh 2008: 15)

The desire for marital equality in the novel *Jane Eyre*, symbolised by Jane’s poverty and plainness, later acquisition of her own fortune, and Rochester’s

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disabled body at the end, is translated into a form of sexual equality in the adaptations of the 1980s and 1990s. In emphasising Jane's oppression and desire – aspects of the novel that admittedly are and should be highlighted by present-day critics – Zeffirelli's adaptation loses the thread of Charlotte Brontë's own position as gendered subject and the trajectory of her heroine to selfhood. For Brontë's Jane does not come to self simply as her own woman, but as an equal to her husband. While Zeffirelli attempts to modernise this radical view, he ends up instead relegating Jane to the dominant gender ideology of the 1990s. Jane's marriage to Rochester is a "feminist triumph" not because she has shown him how to respect her as an individualised subject, but because she has shown him how to love, the film's somewhat prudish take on "erotic fulfillment".

Susanna White's 2006 BBC miniseries again takes up the popular feminism of the 1980s and 1990s, but with a surprisingly counteractive twist: Jane sees herself as a complete subject only after *Rochester* sees her as such. Unlike the 2011 *Jane Eyre*, the heroine is not a modern subject needing to be loved and recognised for that subjectivity, but a woman needing to be loved in order to become that modern subject. Interestingly, however, White's miniseries represents Bertha Mason's madness in more detail than any other adaptation of the last few decades, except perhaps the 1983 BBC miniseries with Zelah Clarke as Jane. Sandy Welch's screenplay uses archetypes to construct the female characters of the film: Jane as the willful child, then the repressed Victorian woman hiding her 'real' self, and finally the individual (and individualist, as Spivak calls her [Spivak 1999: 116]); Blanche Ingram as the beautiful, blond, and vapid love interest; and Bertha as the hot-tempered, jealous Latin woman.<sup>6</sup> While attempting to create a feminist narrative of Victorian female liberation, Welch and White in effect undercut Jane's subjecthood (similarly to Zeffirelli) through these stereotypical representations. One might argue that the screenwriter and director partly remedy this issue by focusing on the more empowering episodes of the novel: Jane leaving Rochester, rejecting St. John's marriage proposal because he does not love her, and returning to her 'true' mate after she wilfully and directly articulates her desires. However, her consistent perception of Rochester as the figure who constructs her identity as a woman and the prolongation of the Jane-Rochester courtship at Ferndean in the film give credence to the former, rather than the latter, argument.

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White's Jane begins her seemingly endless search for love as the orphaned ward of the Reed family. Unlike the Fukunaga adaptation, the representation of Jane's childhood begins with the opening scene of the novel: hiding behind a set of curtains to read, Jane is discovered by her sadistic cousin John who beats her with a book; when she fights back, she is sent to the 'haunted' Red Room as punishment. White's miniseries extends this period of Jane's life with her Reed cousins to show her repeated exclusion from the family. In a scene that has its reprisal at the end of the film, the family poses for a portrait, from which Jane is excluded. At the end of the film Jane poses for her own family portrait with Rochester, their children, the Rivers sisters and their husbands. This framing structure demonstrates that Jane's search is not for individual subjecthood, but for a proper place in a family. While White seems to equate subjectivity with an acknowledged familial relationship (i.e., Jane does not know herself because the Reeds will not recognise her as a subject), the director's representation of that acquired subjectivity becomes increasingly problematic over the course of the adaptation, because Jane's subjectivity is contingent upon Rochester's love and their marriage.

Two scenes from the 2006 *Jane Eyre* may serve as examples of this problematic form of female selfhood. After meeting Blanche Ingram for the first time in Rochester's drawing room, Jane runs upstairs to her own room and takes a long look at her face in the mirror. She proceeds to draw her likeness in black charcoal and a comparative likeness of Blanche in pastels. The play of light and dark here is unmistakable: Jane is 'black and white' and Blanche is 'in colour.' The portrait of Jane is plain, shadowy, and mysterious; the portrait of Blanche is lively, feminine, and alluring. Significantly, however, it is not Jane who sees herself this way; rather, she imagines *Rochester* seeing the two women in this way. A later scene also depicts Jane's self-worth as contingent on Rochester's gaze: when she realises that he may in fact love her, she once again runs to the mirror in her bedroom to examine her face. Now instead of darkness and doom she sees her face, though perhaps not as the equal to Blanche's, at least as 'good' in its own right. She touches her face, examines her complexion, and smiles at what she sees. Again, however, it is not herself she sees, but herself through Rochester's eyes. She perceives her own 'new' worth through her altered sense of his vision of her. Perhaps White was attempting to represent the fact that Jane finally sees herself as others see her. Nonetheless, Jane's

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reflected subjectivity in the film complicates the already fraught female subjectivity Brontë attempted to represent. Jane is no longer her own individual self, but an individual only when Rochester sees her as such.

Compare these two moments to the night before Jane's wedding in Brontë's novel. As she examines her face in the mirror, Jane thinks of the "change" she will undergo in the morning: the woman she will become is

one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. [...] Mrs. Rochester! she did not exist; she would not be born till tomorrow, some time after eight o'clock A.M., and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive, before I assigned her all that property. (Brontë 2003: 319)

When the wedding does not in fact take place, she laments, "And yet, where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday? Where was her life? Where were her prospects?" (Brontë 2003: 343). Both passages show that Jane has never imagined herself as defined solely by Rochester's perspective. Rather, she knows herself as Jane Eyre, and while that Jane Eyre may become Jane Rochester, a person of course changed by that status, her essential subjectivity, as she perceives it, should not change. Jane is reluctant to renounce her last name on these terms, convinced that Jane Rochester will only prove an adequate substitute for Jane Eyre if she arrives in "the world alive". In other words, Jane Rochester is a new aspect of Jane herself, part of Jane's own subjective psychological "property", rather than a mere possession of Rochester.

Fukunaga's 2011 adaptation of *Jane Eyre* attempts to evoke the novel's sense of Jane's selfhood, rather than the one found in White's 2006 adaptation. Moira Buffini's screenplay, however, again uses heteronormative love to foreground a 'feminist' narrative about individuality and Victorian female identity. In contrast to White's problematic representation of Jane's subjectivity, love is depicted not as a subject-making force, but as a subject-completing one. As indicated earlier, Fukunaga's film imagines Jane's subjectivity as 'whole' prior to the opening of the film. While this may seem contradictory, there is a difference between subjecthood and the 'completeness' romantic love is supposed to engender in the modern subject. As Fukunaga's film shows, the twenty-first-century heroine is unique and exceptional, but lacking in true love

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renders her dislocated and alone. Without love, she remains rooted in her extraordinary subjecthood but unable to experience human connection, and unable to share her individuality with others. This depiction of love is the descendant of earlier representations of heteronormative love in film: powerless to ‘sell’ the ‘imperatives’ of motherhood and wifely submission to today’s ‘liberated’ female audiences, Hollywood seems to have come up with this form of popular feminism as compensation and remedy.

Although Fukunaga’s ‘vision’ was “to feel out what Charlotte Brontë was feeling when she was writing” her novel by “spen[ding] a lot of time rereading the book”, as he told *Movieline* (Fukunaga in Buchanan 2010: para. 3), the film was marketed as “[a] love story as fiercely intelligent as it is passionate” (Focus Features 2010). Fukunaga’s decidedly questionable attempt to enter the mind of Brontë at the scene of writing results in elevating the love story until it overwhelms other aspects of the novel. The tagline – where romance is the dominant characteristic of the film – belies Fukunaga’s statement that other adaptations “treat [*Jane Eyre*] like it’s just a period romance, and I think it’s much more than that” (Fukunaga in Buchanan 2010: para. 3). Essentially, Buffini’s screenplay and Fukunaga’s direction classify the novel (and its adaptation) as just that – a classic romance, albeit a would-be post-feminist, rather than period, romance. Fukunaga’s adaptation takes on passionate sexual love as a major tool for selfhood and self-expression. “She conquers,” Gayatri Spivak writes of a character in Rudyard Kipling’s fiction, “as women will, through love” (Spivak 1999: 158). Jane does not need Rochester’s love to tell her she is a subject, but she does need love in order to completely *be* Jane, to be ‘all she can be’. Fukunaga’s adaptation privileges a notion of the Gothic as the transgression of the flesh, rooted in sexual desire, whereas Brontë’s novel privileges Gothic uncanniness as a way to understand and realise one’s place in the patriarchal world. In the film, passionate love must be both freely expressed and appropriately contained in order for companionate marriage to be successful within a patriarchal society. In the novel, love and companionate marriage are the results of the heroine’s struggles to realise her subjecthood in – and in defiance of – a masculine world.

In Gayatri Spivak’s theorisation of *Jane Eyre*’s individualism, the white Western female achieves subjectivity at the expense of the subaltern female (Spivak 1985, 1999). For feminist critics like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Bertha acts as Jane’s dark double, revealing the desires the



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repressed Jane cannot express (Gilbert and Gubar 1979). The 2011 adaptation, however, hardly takes into account Bertha Mason's role in Jane's perception of her place at Thornfield. Rather, according to the film trailer, Jane reaches her potential not as a "childrearing" and "soul-making" individual (Spivak 1999: 116), but as a woman in the movement from a "loveless past" to the "timeless" love she experiences with Rochester (Focus Features 2010). Spivak argues that any postcolonial reading of a novel like *Jane Eyre* should participate in an effort "to wrench oneself away from the mesmerizing focus of the 'subject-constitution' of the female individualist" (Spivak 1999: 117). Fukunaga's adaptation accomplishes this by predicating Jane's subject constitution at the outset of the film. This assumed given, however, combined with Bertha's lack of presence in the film, actually does the opposite of Spivak's injunction, because it not only negates Bertha's importance to the English colonial mission in the novel, but also de-historicises the repressive gender politics of nineteenth-century Britain. Gender repression becomes the problem of wearing corsets and not being able to travel as freely as men can, rather than the highly nuanced political and social structures and stratifications that limited (and continue to limit) women while disguising the extent of those limitations.

While all three periods of adaptation hardly privilege Bertha's story, Fukunaga's film is unique in so far as the director makes a point of claiming to 'access' the writer through the text while removing an integral part of her narrative. Bertha appears in some of the most dramatic scenes in the novel as the culprit who sets fire to Rochester's bed, the disembodied laughter coming from the attic, the unidentified attacker of Richard Mason, the 'vampire' who rends Jane's veil the night before her wedding, and the demonic figure who crawls like an animal and ultimately burns down Thornfield, killing herself and disabling her husband. No adaptation focuses on all of these moments. Yet Fukunaga's neglect of Bertha seems especially troubling in view of his express desire for "raw authenticity" in his purported look at the "darker side" of *Jane Eyre* (Fukunaga qtd. in Buchanan 2010: para. 3). In her discussion of the 2006 *Jane Eyre*, Mead-Willis might equally be speaking about Fukunaga's adaptation:

The claim to originality is an interesting one, as it suggests an anxiety, on the part of the producer, to position the film as distinct from *Jane Eyre's* long tradition of cinematic

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adaptations [...]. Certainly, the image of the screenwriter “mining” the novel, paired with the suggestion that the film will be well-received by “long-term fans of the book,” suggest a cinematic production derived exclusively from Brontë’s text, bypassing generations of ham-fisted, reductive, or otherwise inadequate attempts to put the novel to screen. (Mead-Willis 2010: 29)

In claiming a particular authenticity for their adaptations, Fukunaga and White remind the viewer that other adaptations have failed to capture the actual ‘message’ of the novel, and that their interpretations – ones that emphasise erotic love as subjectivity – are most faithful to the text. To be clear, I am not arguing for fidelity in adaptation here. Rather, it seems to me that a writer or director’s anxiety over fidelity to the text has much to do with what the film actually accomplishes. Claims to authenticity only serve to cement the ideology of the adaptation by attempting to historicise and naturalise its premises.

Interestingly enough, Fukunaga did not originally set out to remove these parts of the narrative from the film. As one can see from the deleted scenes and the original trailer, Bertha initially played a much larger role in the ‘Gothic’ remake. In an interview with National Public Radio’s *Morning Edition* in early 2011, Fukunaga stated that although the secret in the attic “shocked” him as a child, he was afraid of privileging fear over romance in his own version of the story (Fukunaga in Montagne 2011: para. 6). “Once you start mixing horror [with romance],” he explained, “it’s very difficult to tell the audience what kind of film they’re watching. It’s rare that you can promote a love story and feel fear in a film” (Fukunaga in Montagne 2011: para. 7).<sup>6</sup> Fukunaga’s manipulation of the text obscures the sensations the novel originally set out to produce, and, more importantly, demonises Bertha Mason almost to the point where she is too frightening to appear at all. When she does appear, she has been ‘tamed’ into a docile night-gowned woman who seems to have misplaced her hairbrush. The deleted scene, however, restructures the film’s apparent ideology by reinforcing the limitations of the masculine world that has failed Bertha.

In the novel, Bertha creeps into Jane’s room the night before her wedding and tears in two the costly veil Rochester has purchased for his bride. In the 2006 miniseries, the actual rending takes place in the darkness.

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While Bertha does hold a candle up to look at Jane, we see only the light of the flame, not Bertha's face. Jane faints and when she wakes, her veil lies torn on the floor. In the 2011 adaptation, this scene is extended to Bertha slowly creeping out of the attic and quite dramatically rending the veil in front of Jane, pulling it over her face as if she were clawing her way out of a womb or a caul. The difference in these representations is crucial to an understanding of the function of heteronormative love and the other in millennial adaptations. In the first film, Bertha is repeatedly represented as some 'hot-blooded' Caribbean woman. Perhaps the attempt is to de-animalise the passionate 'villain' of Brontë's novel, but it succeeds only in re-othering Bertha. Sue Thomas writes that Brontë's Bertha is "enslaved and bestialized by her passions" (Thomas 1999: 7), and Jenny Sharpe notes that her "'whiteness' alone is not the sign of racial purity" (Sharpe 1993: 46). In the White adaptation, Bertha's nationality has been changed from Jamaican Creole to non-descript Latin American. Played by the Argentinian actress Claudia Coulter, Bertha appears in this film as jealous, passionate, and vying with Jane for male attention. Her 'madness' is less a product of white Creole degeneracy, than a form of stereotypical Latin jealousy and uncontrollable desires. One of Rochester's memories of her, seen in a flashback, is her leering and laughing at him while having sex with another man. This representation of Latina women portrays them as inherently sexualised. At the same time, switching Bertha's national identity suggests that all Caribbean, Creole, and South American women are interchangeable. After Jane and Rochester's failed wedding, his first bride attempts to coquettishly arrange her hair before the two priests, her brother Richard Mason, and the legal representative her husband has brought to the attic. When she sees Jane standing there too, however, she scowls and begins screaming "*Putá! Putá!*" (Whore! Whore!) at the confused Jane (*Jane Eyre* 2006: episode 3, 1:49:29-1:49:34). This stereotypical portrait of a Latin woman crazy with jealousy only serves to reinforce Bertha's status as other and create a "fairly chauvinistic fetishization of foreignness", as Mead-Willis writes of the representation of Adèle's "Frenchness" in the film (Mead-Willis 2010: 36).

In a sense, Fukunaga's adaptation accomplishes what White's does not in its representation of Bertha: it replicates Jane's dislocation in that of Rochester's first wife and provokes the feeling that Jane may also become a captive with Rochester as her jailer. The scene begins with Bertha emerging

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from a wardrobe in the attic, where she hides from her attendant, Grace Poole, preparing to creep into Jane's bedroom. On a dowel hangs what appears to be a wedding dress, presumably her own, which hides her face. When Jane finally sees her, Bertha is seated on the floor wearing Jane's veil, as if she were dressed for her own wedding. The juxtaposition of the two wedding outfits – Bertha's in the attic and Jane's veil – and the symbolism of Bertha's veiling and unveiling, suggest that Bertha sees Jane as possibly becoming like her. It is as if Bertha is portraying Jane in the tableau of Jane's future. She rips Jane's veil across her face and breathes a sigh of relief. She then proceeds to rub her cheek against Jane's, singing what appears to be a lullaby. Bertha emerges from the veil like an infant, relieved to be free of her prison, which suggests associations with Jane's innocence and naiveté. The scene also evokes the novel's image of Bertha as 'birthed' from Jane's own repression, fear, and forbidden desire. Rochester's first wife is a 'monstrous' birth, representing to Jane the Mrs. Rochester who may be "born" in the morning through the Mrs. Rochester already alive (Brontë 2003: 319). When Bertha sings the lullaby in the film, caressing Jane as she sings, she becomes a substitute mother, protecting Jane from what is to come, but also reminding her that she may be doomed to repeat her 'mother's' mistakes. According to Patsy Stoneman, in the novel "it is Bertha who occupies the Oedipal position of the mother" (Stoneman 1996: 185). This scene in Fukunaga's adaptation represents Jane's forbidden desire for her 'father' Rochester, her need to 'kill' the mother in order to possess the father, and the doomed lineage the Oedipal mother represents for the female child, who herself may become the Oedipal mother in due course (see Wyatt 1985: 200-202; Marsh 2004: 82, 84). Along the same line, Bertha represents Homi Bhabha's argument that "[t]he visibility of the racial/colonial Other is at once a *point* of identity [...] and at the same time a *problem*" (Bhabha qtd. in Murdoch 2002: 2; original emphasis). In Fukunaga's adaptation, Bertha's appearance in the veil-rendering scene at once signals her importance to Jane's subject construction, especially as Rochester's wife, and Jane's need to dissociate herself from the potential history of marriage that Bertha symbolises. In editing this scene from the film, Fukunaga reverses the cultural work of this moment in the adaptation. Yet, crucially, the scene's inclusion on the disc allows the viewer, if only for a moment, to "confron[t] the forces of (sexual) darkness only tentatively contained in the attic" (Gilbert 1998: 370), and view Jane

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and Bertha through a postcolonial and a feminist lens, rather than the conservative nostalgia of the typical romance and heritage film. While ultimately privileging heteronormative love over gendered subject construction in the final version of the film, the transgressive representation of Bertha in the deleted scene places emphasis on the historicity – and the female Gothic undertones – which the adaptation ultimately does away with.

In the attic, a painting of a Madonna and Child watches Bertha emerge from the wardrobe where her wedding dress hangs. If Jane is Bertha's 'child', perhaps doomed to suffer at the hands of the patriarchal society that represses her, then an equal marriage may not be the saving grace the rest of the film establishes it to be. Yet Jane, as a unique individual, does not need love to construct her subjectivity. Rather, love in Fukunaga's film will only bring Jane the sense of completeness and satisfaction she lacks as the female viewer's proto-feminist predecessor. Still, Bertha's lurking presence in the attic – too 'shocking' to focus on – undermines the neat borders of Fukunaga's 'timeless love story'. Bertha's rending of Jane's wedding veil serves to demonstrate that women's suffering in a masculine world does not end with love or marriage, but continues on as an unbroken legacy.

Fukunaga's adaptation, as I have argued here, assumes that subjectivity is always-already present, creating Jane as an atemporal subject. The 'timelessness' Fukunaga allocates to her elides the Victorian gender and power dynamics with which the novel is concerned, despite the fact that his attempt follows popular feminist ideals of the independent modern woman. Unlike its predecessors, this *Jane Eyre* tries to fashion Jane's independence as uniquely her own, without the necessity of the male gaze. Following films of the 1940s, 1990s, and 2000s, however, Fukunaga's adaptation relies on the love story in order to hold onto 'timelessness' despite the historical limitations of Jane's subject progression. As such, Jane's worth is located in the viewer's valuation of her as a romantic subject, belying any effort the film might have made at representing the story as ambivalent about its conclusions.

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### **Notes**

1. Here I am thinking not only of the *Jane Eyre* adaptations I focus on in this essay, but also films like *Wuthering Heights* (2009) and (2011), and *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) and (2005).
2. Brontë herself wrote to her sister Emily, “The right path is that which necessitates the greatest sacrifice of self-interest” (Brontë qtd. in Gaskell 1846: 227). Her heroine, Jane Eyre, follows this same paradigm to achieve selfhood, except that once selfhood is achieved, Jane allows herself to marry Rochester. In my definition of the subject, I am partially following Regenia Gagnier in *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain*: “the subject is a subject to itself”; “the subject is a subject to, and of, others”; and “the subject is a subject of knowledge” (or the discourse of social institutions) (Gagnier 1991: 8).
3. The divisions I have created are based on different conceptions of heteronormative love in these film adaptations. Thus, I have excluded the period from the 1950s through the 1980s, because the films of this period do not differ much from those of the periods before and after them. In the same vein, I have not looked at the first *Jane Eyre* adaptations, because the Joan Fontaine film is most representative of the form of heteronormative love I am theorising in the early films. In addition, the limited access most viewers have to very early adaptations deters me from discussing them. For more information on these other texts, see Stoneman 1998.
4. Fontaine achieved fame as an actress playing the second Mrs. de Winter in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1940 adaptation of Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938), which some argue is a loose adaptation of *Jane Eyre*.
5. For more on filiation and affiliation, see Said 1993 and Spivak 1999.
6. Fukunaga’s premise is itself flawed, since this is exactly what the female Gothic sets out to accomplish and what *Jane Eyre* itself intends in its Gothic romance plot.

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