

Power Dynamics in Adaptations of *Jane Eyre*

The Different Depictions of Jane and Rochester's Interactions

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Introduction

A masterpiece of English fiction is bound to be adapted for theatre, radio, film or television. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has been adapted hundreds of times (Stoneman xi). These adaptations change: over time, Bertha Mason becomes more humanised; Jane is made plainer.¹ An element that changes less obviously in the adaptations is their representation of the power dynamics between Jane and Rochester. Brennan, in her inclusive reading of *Jane Eyre*, mentions the power is usually seen to lie with Rochester at the beginning of the relationship. She goes on to explain how Jane's return to Rochester marks the flip in the power hierarchy (87). She even mentions the Freudian reading of Rochester's blindness, where Rochester's blindness stands for his castration and loss of "masculine power" (90). Mann, in her paper on Bertha, shows how recently adapted Rochesters have to hand in power to appeal to modern audiences (161).

As Terence Hawkes points out, we have to confront "not the great works of art in themselves [. . .] but the ways in which those works of art have been processed [. . .] as part of the struggle for cultural meaning" (123). Therefore, this study will investigate the changing ideals of power patterns by comparing four different adaptations to one another and to Brontë's 1847 novel. They will be discussed in each chapter in chronological order. Franklin Schaffner's adaptation of 1949 is the first. As a 59 minute film, it is the shortest. It stars Mary Sinclair (with an American accent) and Charlton Heston. Julian Amyes's 1983 TV-series, in contrast, is 239 minutes long. It stars Zelah Clarke and Timothy Dalton. The other two adaptations are from the 21st century: Susanna White's 2006 TV-series is 202 minutes long, starring Ruth Wilson and Toby Stephens, and Cary Fukunaga's 2011 film is 120 minutes. It stars Mia Wasikowska and Michael Fassbender, notably both with a northern accent. With two long adaptations and two short ones, it is interesting to see what the different versions exclude from their plots. White's 2006 version is the only one discussed here with a female director. But it is worth mentioning that the 20th century adaptations both have male directors and writers, while the 21st century adaptations both have female writers.

¹ Stoneman explains how "recent versions of *Jane Eyre* have included material from Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (4).

To limit the scope of this paper, the analysis of the novel and adaptations will focus on a comparison of three scenes that are present in every version. These scenes make up the three chapters of this study: they are the first meeting, Jane's departure, and Jane's return, respectively. In examining the changing power dynamic between Jane and Rochester, these scenes are vital, because they contain the first meeting, where the power dynamic is begun in favour of Rochester, Jane's departure, where Jane defies Rochester's patriarchal power by leaving him, and Jane's return, where Jane takes up the role of caregiver and leader.

When critically reviewing films, it is easy to fall into the snare of "fidelity to the novel": simply comparing the film to the original novel and condemning any differences as omissions or misreading, says McFarlane, author of *Novel to Film* (8). This entails a "notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single correct meaning" that only the critic has full access to (8). McFarlane recommends approaching adaptations as "a process of convergence among the arts" and intertextuality should be considered rather than rigidly keeping to the plot in the novel (8). For example, in adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, the representation of Bertha, Rochester's first wife, changed after Jean Rhys' post-colonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Stoneman 4). However, sometimes adaptations do leave out a crucial plot point or element, and even when intertextuality is taken into consideration, this damages the overall result. The audience experiences them as bad adaptations. McFarlane accounts for this feeling by adapting Roland Barthes' theory of narrative to film plots.

Barthes' theory was designed for novels, but, as McFarlane shows, is a good tool to compare the transposition from novel to film.² Barthes divides the narrative functions of every narrative into two groups: the distributional and the integrative (Barthes 246). The distributional functions are the linear actions of a narrative (for example, the marriage between Jane and Rochester), and they are easily transferred to another medium, such as film. However, integrative functions, such as character traits or atmospheres, are only adaptable (McFarlane 13). Within these two groups (the events, and their mood) there are two different types of narrative functions. Firstly, cardinal functions are the important hinge points in the plot. A cardinal distributional function, for example, is when Jane is sent to Lowood. A cardinal integrative function, then, is the gothic presence of Bertha at Thornfield. All functions that are not cardinal, such as the closing of a window or a servant's disposition, are called catalysers, after Barthes, and they fill up the narrative with "moment-to-moment minutae" (248). McFarlane convincingly argues that when the cardinal functions of a

² For a visual aid to this theory, see Appendix A.

narrative, either distributional or integrative, are missing from the adaptation, the viewer experiences this as a real loss to the story (14). This paper will show how the loss of big and small narrative functions affects the reproduced power dynamic between Jane and Rochester. At the start of each chapter, the cardinal functions will be picked from the wealth of information found in the novel.

Brontë's Jane is a modern heroine: a young woman with no fortune, but with an education and an independent spirit. In investigating the power hierarchy between Jane and Rochester, it becomes clear that Jane can only be independent if Rochester is prepared to be mastered or at least equalled in his intellect and authority. "My bride is here, because my equal is here," so Brontë's Rochester says (331). The younger the adaptation, the more likely it conforms to this statement: the two 21st century adaptations star Byronic heroes who lean more towards their soft sides, while the 20th century versions' Rochesters lean more towards the brusque, dominant side of the Byronic spectrum. Jane's motives for her departure and return to Rochester, always explained in the novel, are harder to find in the adaptations. They are worth taking the time, because they show why Brontë's Jane defies Rochester: she does it for herself, not for society's sake. Jane's return in the novel shows a surprisingly domesticated Rochester and a confident, caring Jane: the roles of power have been reversed. But not all the adaptations gave their happy ending a balanced couple.

Chapter 1: The First Meeting

Jane describes her first meeting with Rochester as “an incident of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense” (Brontë 149). For her, it is only special because it was an unusually active moment in her monotonous life. Of course, she does yet not realise that the man she meets on Hay Lane is her employer. To the reader, the appearance of the man is immediately interesting, because of the possible romance he introduces. It quickly becomes clear that the short scene is *the* first meeting between the hero and heroine, and requires investigation.

What makes the meeting so special in the novel is the fact that Jane and Rochester meet as strangers; Jane is not aware Rochester is her superior. The scene also has a gothic quality; Jane fantasises about the Gytrash, a mythical monster, just as Rochester comes into her life. The gothic element is important in relation to power dynamics, because Rochester is not an uncanny fantasy, and his profound un-mythological air gives Jane courage. Jane’s romantic “fancies” (144) are contrasted with Rochester’s appearance, foreshadowed by the narrator’s description of the scene: “as, in a picture, the solid mass of a crag, or the rough boles of a great oak, drawn in dark and strong on the foreground, efface the aerial distance of azure hill, sunny horizon, and blended clouds where tint melts into tint. (144)”

Rochester’s very bad manners and roughness put Jane at ease, and she offers to help him. She even insists. This demonstration of her independence is what interests Rochester in her, and, as Mann points out, this is what makes him ask her who she is (157). Much later in the plot he reveals that he only let her go on to Hay that night because he “had learnt that this elf must return to [him]” (408).

To the discerning reader, this scene is vital because the power hierarchy between Jane and Rochester is established. When Rochester finds out Jane is his subordinate, he does not inform her of this, but he asks her for assistance. In doing so, he tests Jane. He wants to see what she will do for a brusque stranger, when she is under no obligation to him. Jane bravely, but unsuccessfully attempts to pacify his trampling horse, and then “leads Mahomet to the mountain” (148). Jane has helped Rochester, and has shown both a “sort of authority” and her independence (408). She even stresses that she is “not at all afraid of being out late when it is moonlight” (147). She treats Rochester as an equal, because she is not intimidated. This male version of the damsel in distress-motif momentarily gives Jane the upper hand in the power

struggle. These subtle details form the fundamentals of Jane and Rochester's relationship: Jane is a servant, but she can speak her mind. Rochester learns to be polite in her company. Therefore, in researching Jane and Rochester's power dynamics, this first meeting is the natural starting point. What this chapter attempts to achieve, then, is a comparison between Brontë's idea of Jane and Rochester's power dynamics, and the power dynamics represented in the four adaptations.

1949: Franklin J. Schaffner

This is a 59-minute long adaptation of Brontë's three-volume novel, so it is inevitable some of the cardinal functions have been left out. In Brontë's description of the first meeting, the fact that Jane and Rochester meet as strangers outside of Thornfield's household hierarchy is emphasised. In this film, the scene in Hay lane has been completely left out, and Jane meets Rochester when he summons her to him, like he does in the book on their second meeting.

There is no sense of equality, and no fallen gentleman. Heston's Rochester is the dominant patriarch right from the start. For the first two minutes he is present all the viewer sees of him are his hands, playing with a riding crop. Immediately, the relationship becomes sexually charged with male dominance. Sinclair is a very demure and prettily smiling Jane, seemingly smitten with Rochester from the start.³ She moves as if she went to a finishing school: she glides as if she were on wheels. Rochester questions her briefly about her childhood. Jane's pictures, which could serve as a way to show her original mind in this scene, do not appear, and her parting comment "I will do my best to give satisfaction, sir" is almost hilariously sexually subservient.

Visually, Schaffner makes it hard to sympathise with Jane in this scene. The viewer does not see her point of view; while Jane is watching Rochester's face, we are watching Rochester's hands with the crop. Another defamiliarising aspect is the clear contrast in accents of the two American actors: Heston's Rochester uses Received Pronunciation while Sinclair's Jane has a General American accent. It appears that Sinclair does attempt a British accent, but just does not succeed, for in her line "Mrs Fairfax answered my advertisement" she places the primary word stress on the antepenultimate syllable instead of the first, as General American has it.

³ For stills from the different films, see Appendix B.

If this film had been three hours instead of one and the scene in Hay Lane had been included, it is questionable whether Jane would have persistently offered help to the fallen Rochester. Schaffner's portrayal of Jane makes it seem more likely that she would have burst into tears or fainted. During their first meeting, none of Jane's qualities are discovered, other than that she can play the piano a little, "like any other English school-girl" (Brontë 160). There is no bravery, no independence and no originality of mind – nothing that makes Brontë's Jane such a unique heroine. Barthes's theory, which would certainly classify the accident a cardinal function, explains why this version is unsatisfactory. The integrative function that is crucial to a modern audience's approval of Jane, namely an independent, strong-willed Jane, is missing too. This film came out in the same year as De Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe*, but its influence of second-wave feminism is not yet felt in this adaptation, as Mann points out (154). In this scene, there is no doubt that Jane is Rochester's subordinate.

1983: Julian Amyes

This TV series is a clear example of "transposition": Wagner's term for the kind of adaptation that tries to stay as close as possible to the original novel (222). For four hours it attempts to follow the book almost word-by-word. The scene in which Jane meets Rochester is even preceded by a voice over in which Jane ponders what it means to be an intelligent woman confined to one place. The speech is taken from the book, two pages (but three months) before Jane's first meeting with Rochester (140). This voice-over foreshadows Rochester's coming and signals its importance to the audience, even though, as in the book, some time passes before they actually meet.⁴

As the adaptation aims to be faithful to the novel, it is interesting to see which of Barthes's catalysers (or moment-to-moment minutiae) are left out of the scene, and what this means for the relationship established between Jane and Rochester. The first element that is absent in this scene is the gothic; Jane wanders through a green, leafy lane, on a carpet of grass. Peaceful music is playing in the background, and the moon shines brightly. It is a stark contrast with Brontë's Jane, who fantasised about the Gytrash in a solitary lane of "leafless repose" (143). As for the dialogue in the film, Jane does not say she is not afraid to be outside alone, and she is not asked to get the wild steed to Rochester. These omissions mean that Jane

⁴ According to Mann, this space of time serves to make Rochester's role in the plot less obvious, while still giving the reader a hint (156).

cannot show her courage, which is a pity, for the sight of the tiny Clarke, trying to calm down a great steed, would have made the point brilliantly.⁵

In addition, Dalton's Rochester does not advise Jane to hurry back home as soon as she can; that phrase is replaced by another barked "stand aside!" As we can deduce from Rochester's later confessions in the novel that his ardent curiosity prompted him to urge Jane back to Thornfield, this omission implies that Dalton's Rochester is either much more capable of acting aloof, or that he is not as intrigued by Jane. His limping to his horse, aided by Jane, is more a stride than a limp. Dalton's Rochester does not need Jane to lean on.

McFarlane is right to say that not only left-out cardinal functions but also seemingly insignificant catalysers can alter a scene's impact. Although at first glance, this scene is identical to the novel, it does not fully convey how intriguing Jane's character is, and how interested Rochester is. It should also be noted here that Dalton is a very tall, handsome Rochester and Clarke is a twenty-nine year old Jane. Dalton consequently towers over Jane, and she does not have that freshness that Rochester seeks. The result is a dark, dominant Rochester who seems almost impervious to harm, and a passive Jane who cannot really be useful to Rochester.

2006: Susanna White

White's adaptation, the only one discussed here directed by a woman, proves how well a film adaptation can translate a novel with an emphasis on showing.⁶ Wilson's Jane has no voice-overs to stress her monotonous life. Instead, the scene is given its melancholy and slightly uncanny quality through images. We see Jane sitting on a slope near Thornfield, and she looks up to see a shawl wave from a window in the mysterious tower. The audience and Jane know there is something suspicious about that shawl: only Grace Pool is supposed to be up there, but she is unlikely to play with a shawl. From this reminder of the gothic, we cut to Jane walking alone in a misty glen. A lonely sheep bleats, and the musical theme of the Creole wife lingers in the background. It is near twilight.

Then, again with images, the change that Rochester brings is indicated. In the reading of Brontë's novel, above, attention has been drawn to the gothic scene, and the way in which

⁵ See Appendix B for a picture of the couple.

⁶ McFarlane shows the English novel has changed from telling to showing (5). This adaptation shows the same tendency towards showing.

Rochester's appearance into Jane's world of "fancies" is introduced as a bold tree trunk that effaced the rest of the painting (144). White uses the same device to introduce her Rochester into Jane's lonely walk. Rochester on his horse becomes the bold, masculine force that brightens up Jane's uneventful life. The frame cuts from Jane's lonely, silent and dreamy scene to the racing horse with dramatic music, then back to Jane's silent scene, and back again to the dramatic view from Rochester's eyes. Like Brontë, White shows the importance of Rochester's arrival to the audience, but not to Jane.

The power hierarchy that is established in this scene subtly captures the atmosphere of the novel. Jane persistently offers help, and tries to catch the wild horse's bridle. Rochester leans heavily on her while limping to his horse. He is very eager indeed to get up it, and when he has safely reached the higher ground, he immediately assumes a charming, teasing air. It is clear that Stephen's Rochester prefers not to need anyone's help, but he is gracious enough to thank Jane once he is safely on his horse. Jane, noticing this change in attitude, assures him she is an independent young woman by pointing out that she will "post her letter first" before hurrying back as he suggests. As Mann points out, "these instances readjust the power dynamic and pick up on that dimension of Rochester and Jane's exchanges that is evident in the novel" (157). Thus, the integrative function, so hard to capture, has successfully been translated from novel to film.

2011: Cary J. Fukunaga

Fukunaga's recent adaptation also stresses showing rather than telling. Pietrzak-Franger argues that Fukunaga uses "window-scapes to set the limit to women's agency" (270). When Jane, portrayed by Wasikowska, vents her frustration by talking to Mrs Fairfax, the audience sees her from behind a "prison-like, [. . .] heavy, woven grid of window partitions" (270). Fukunaga has made the atmosphere of the first meeting quite uncanny. Jane walks through a misty and sombre forest, with spooky birds that surprise her. Earlier, she thought Adèle the story of the Gytrash, and it is quite possible that fantasy is in her mind again as she walks Hay Lane. This scene has the same gothic quality the novel has.

Rochester appears out of nowhere; the audience was completely absorbed in Jane's consciousness. As she did not hear him approaching, nor did the audience. Fassbender plays a very temperamental, arrogant injured Rochester. Interestingly, he also is the only Rochester discussed here who has a northern accent. He ignores Jane's proposal of help and skips ahead

to the question: “Who are you?” This means she cannot insist on “staying till he is fit to mount his horse” (147). Rochester haughtily orders Jane to fetch his horse, and when she looks at the wild horse, he says “If you would be so kind” in a voice dripping with sarcasm. Jane attempts to fetch the steed, but fails. Once he is mounted, and reassuringly placed above Jane again, Fassbender’s Rochester still does not thank Jane. He seems almost angry to be in her debt. He does, however, order her to make haste with her letter, which hints to the viewers that he wants to see her again.

Jane, meanwhile, says little but has an air of defiance. She does not do Rochester’s bidding without pausing, looking at him, and letting him know that she does not think much of his manners. Without voicing her opinions, Wasikowska’s Jane shows that she does have them. Just with her facial expressions and hesitations, she shows her own authority and independence. This Jane helps because it is the right thing to do, not because she is intimidated by Rochester’s haughty dominance. As in White’s version, the translation from novel to film seems to have gone smoothly; all the cardinal functions are there.

The gothic element returns to the 21st-century adaptations, while it was absent from the 20th-century two adaptations discussed here. The gothic not only serves to portray Jane as the unprotected orphan in a hostile world; it also gives Jane courage. She is scared of the ‘tramp-tramp’ of the horse’s hooves until she sees Rochester on his back; she is pulled out of her imaginary world by the stranger’s appearance. Instead of a mythical monster, it is merely an injured man, and she need not be afraid of him. The Janes in the latter two adaptations receive confidence from the gothic element, because Rochester is no threat compared to the Gytrash.

In this scene in the novel, Rochester is not only angry because he is in pain; he is also annoyed to be injured and dependent upon a stranger. It is Jane’s attitude (a crucial integrative function) that determines the power dynamics in every version of this scene, and for a great part of their lives at Thornfield. Schaffner’s 1949 Jane is not interested in showing independence; she wants to show her servitude. Amyes’s 1983 Jane is very willing to help Rochester, but she does not appear to be of much use to him. She thus shows that it is not enough to copy dialogue from novel to film; Jane needs something more to demonstrate her independence and originality. In White’s 2006 version, Jane has this quality. She is determined to help, and Rochester is pleasantly surprised by her, although he needs to be on his horse to become pleasant and even start flirting. This Jane receives the attention she deserves right from the start, because she claims it. Fukunaga’s 2011 Jane is less outspoken; her Rochester is less charismatic. They are less polished in their manners but more reserved

than the previous adaptations. Still, they too establish a power dynamic instead of a clear hierarchy with Rochester at the top.

Chapter 2: Jane's Departure

Jane's departure from Thornfield and her motives for it are interesting in this study of power dynamics, because this event marks the turning point in their relationship. At their first meeting, the starting point, Rochester is the masculine patriarch, and Jane is an independent employee. Months later, when Jane leaves Thornfield, the power has shifted towards Jane. Rochester binds Jane to him by loving her, and he is her master in the household hierarchy. However, experience and confidence serve to give Jane control over Rochester.

This departure scene takes place in the library, some hours after the interrupted wedding. He wants to apologise and explain why he concealed his wife's existence. Jane, meanwhile, realises she has to leave him. Her motives for this decision are crucial in this study: they show her self-respect. Her high demands of her own conduct place her, morally, above Rochester, who wants to make Jane his mistress. Brontë endorses Jane's morals by granting her a perfect happy ending after her troubles.

Jane's first reaction to Rochester's deceit is one of hurt and anger: "Oh, never more could I turn to him; for faith was blighted – confidence destroyed!" (386). When he tells her how much he loves her, she quickly forgives him, and pities his unhappy marriage.⁷ This shows her Christian spirit of forgiveness. However, she does not forget that to live with a married man, according to the Christian values she believes in, is immoral and wrong. Rochester thinks he apprehends her reasoning: "You have as good as said that I am a married man—as a married man you will shun me, keep out of my way" (391). Rochester misses the point. He does not realise that Jane's reasoning goes beyond "a mere human law": it follows her self-respect (414). When Rochester recounts how he used to live with mistresses, he notes that "[mistresses and slaves] are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading" (407). Jane "feels the truth of these words" and mentally promises herself never to give in to Rochester, because if she were "to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard [her] with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory" (407). Jane would rather leave the man she loves now,

⁷ Much later, it becomes clear that Jane does not forget or completely forgive Rochester's monumental deceit, although she thinks she does. Chapter 3 explains how Jane, at her return, half-jokingly pays Rochester back for his deception, evincing her need for some revenge.

when they are equals, than to live with him as an inferior. Jane not only fears to lose Rochester's love, but also her own. To his question "Who would care?" she mentally answers: "*I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself*" (414).

Rochester's main struggle in this scene is his realisation that he can dominate Jane's body, as he is rich and far stronger than she is, but he cannot influence her mind. "Whatever I do with [Jane's] cage, I cannot get at it! [. . .] and it is you, spirit, that I want: not alone your brittle frame" (415). Jane has the same awareness of the split between her body and soul: "Conscience, turned tyrant, held Passion by the throat" (388). In contrast to Rochester, she is comforted by it: "Physically, I felt powerless [. . .], mentally, I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety" (415). Her sense of self makes her persist, and actively dominate Rochester: "I saw that in another minute, I should be able to do nothing with him. The passing second was all I had to control and restrain him [. . .] I felt an inward power; a sense of influence" (395). Rochester, eventually, recognises this dominance: "Consider that eye, [. . .] defying me, with more than courage – with a stern triumph" (415). Jane does indeed leave Rochester crying in the library, and returns for a final goodbye in which she recommends him a life of piety (416). This slightly patronising action shows how secure Jane feels of her power over Rochester in that moment.

In McFarlane's theory of adaptation, then, the cardinal (major) functions of the scene are Jane's motivations; consisting of loss of trust, immorality, and crucially, self-respect. Rochester's role in this scene is his despair and powerlessness to make Jane stay. The power and control is all in Jane's hands: her body may be weak, but her mind is far too strong for her to give in. She knows Rochester loves her for their equality, so she cannot degrade herself by living with him. With Rochester's perverseness in offering her a life of sin, and with Jane's self-discipline in rejecting the man she loves under these circumstances, Jane becomes the moral superior. This knowledge gives her the authority and calm to control Rochester.

1949: Franklin J. Schaffner

Jane's motives for departure in Schaffner's adaptation are very hard to deduce. The scene, with its duration of one and a half minutes, does not leave much room for her explanation. When Rochester asks Jane why she leaves, she answers "I must". She adds that she still loves him, which shows that it must be hard for her to leave him. The only implication her short

answer gives is that it is wrong to live with a married man. Still, she is not angry at Rochester for deceiving her, and she does not mention her pride and self-respect, which in Brontë's Jane lie at the core of the decision to leave.

The power dynamics between Heston's Rochester and Sinclair's Jane have completely reversed since their first meeting. Compared to the sexually dominant Rochester who was in absolute power in Thornfield, this sobbing Rochester, asking Jane to stay, is a pitiful sight. The positions of the two lovers reflect this reversion of power hierarchy: Rochester kneels on the steps of the staircase Jane is climbing, clutching her waist. He even voices Jane's superiority of mind: "You're stronger than I am – stay here!" Jane, placed above him, bends down gracefully and says goodbye. She is master of the situation.

In Schaffner's interpretation, then, Jane certainly has power, but it is not made clear where it comes from: the issue of the hidden wife upstairs and Rochester's attempt to make Jane his mistress are not mentioned. Jane's moral superiority is still there, as she is leaving her married lover, but the absence of her self-respect and self-worth make the act of leaving less powerful. She is leaving, so it seems, because God and the law command it, rather than that she herself commands it.

1983: Julian Amyes

Amyes' adaptation reserves ample time for this scene: eleven minutes, most of which are filled with Rochester's explanation and offers of a life in France. The dialogue largely follows the novel, so it is striking that again, the cardinal motivations of destroyed trust and self-respect are left out. As in the shorter 1949 version, Jane's only motivation for leaving Rochester seems to be society's disapproval of living with a married man.

Most of the scene is taken up by Rochester's tale of his life with the madwoman, which takes time and attention away from Jane's reasoning. There are shots that focus on Rochester's face for a full minute, while he slowly speaks about his horrible marriage. Interestingly, Dalton's Rochester skips the part of his life he spent with several mistresses, and his hatred of them. All this casts Rochester as the sometimes erring but ultimately caring man who deserves pity, not anger. The perfect opportunity for Jane to assert her self-worth is presented, when, following the novel, Rochester says "is it better to drive a man to madness than to transgress a mere human law, no man being injured in the breach?" Jane is not given an opportunity to give her signature answer "*I care for myself*", which means that even without friends she still has to earn her own respect. Rochester immediately grabs her and

vents his frustration at his power over her body, but not her soul. In summation, then, this scene has Rochester's pain and frustration at its centre, instead of Jane's strength of mind.

The power dynamics of their relationship are not greatly affected by this focus on Rochester. While the tall Dalton raves about the room, Clarke's Jane sits quietly in a massive chair, or gets shaken by Dalton's Rochester. It beautifully illustrates Rochester's powerlessness to command Jane's mind, since he is her physical superior, but cannot convince her to stay. As she sits in the chair and Rochester paces about or stands in front of her like a petulant schoolboy, she certainly has control over him. She seems to have that "sense of inward power" that Brontë described (395). Therefore, though Jane's motives remain unexplained in the focus on Rochester's all-consuming desire to rectify his mistakes, Jane's superiority is subtly made manifest in this adaptation.

2006: Susanna White

White's interpretation of this scene is original in several ways. Firstly, the scene is divided into two parts which are presented as flashbacks when Jane lives with the Rivers family. Secondly, the scene takes place in Jane's bedroom after she has put on her old clothes again. This is symbolic for casting off her life with Rochester, and remaining Jane Eyre. Thirdly, and most noticeably, the scene is sexually charged. Jane and Rochester lie on the bed, while he is caressing and kissing her.⁸ This is a drastic change from the novel where Jane turns her head away from any kiss Rochester attempts to give her in the library.

The sexual tone of the scene has two functions. It is a way for Stephens's Rochester to show his power over Jane's body, and his powerlessness over her soul. As Brontë's Jane said "Conscience held Passion by the throat" (388), so too does Wilson's Jane experience an inner conflict. Secondly, the sexual attraction between the two lovers, clearly visible in the novel as well as in the film, illustrates why Jane has to leave:

ROCHESTER. The last time, Jane! What! do you think you can live with me, and see me daily, and yet, if you still love me, be always cold and distant?

JANE. No, sir; that I am certain I could not; and therefore I see there is but one way: but you will be furious if I mention it. (396)

⁸ See Appendix B for a still.

While in the novel these lines only in passing mention Jane's awareness of her sexual attraction to Rochester, this information is zoomed in on in the TV series. Jane realises she must leave; otherwise her 'Passion' will eventually conquer her 'Conscience' (388). Rochester is aware of it too, and in White's adaptation he uses Jane's weakness to its utmost. This adds depth to one of Jane's motives: the degradation of being a mistress.

In addition, this tender scene of human warmth shows the enormity of Jane's sacrifice: she knows now what she is denying herself. The underlying principle of self-respect is not voiced by Wilson's Jane, but, crucially, is made visible: when Rochester proposes the life of a mistress in France, she recoils from him, gasps shocked and surprised, and tries to leave. She smiles at the scene Rochester describes as if to say: that is all very well, but you and I both know we cannot live a "sedate and traditional" life together.

The power dynamics of this scene are greatly influenced by the sexual tone of the scene. Rochester knows what he is doing, and Jane looks as if she needs all her mental faculties to keep from returning his kisses. Rochester, then, is in control of the situation. It is clear why Jane must leave; while she lives there, her mind may remain firm, but her body is subject to passion. Brontë's "flee from temptation" is incarnated in Wilson's Jane (417). Once outside of Thornfield, Jane has control over her body again. White's interpretation of this scene works two ways: it takes away Jane's control over Rochester, but it also serves to show her fortitude of mind in leaving Thornfield. The dominant force in this scene, then, is Rochester, but the superiority of mind lies with Jane. She consciously runs from a happy life because she cannot bear the idea of being someone's mistress.

2011: Cary Fukunaga

Fukunaga only spends five minutes on this scene, but found a way to include all of Brontë's defining catalysts. Jane's interior replies to Rochester's assumptions and suggestions are voiced in the film. This makes Wasikowska's Jane a powerful, outspoken presence, and gives her the opportunity to make her motivations for leaving explicit.

Wasikowska's Jane is not as immediately forgiving as the three Janes previously discussed. When Rochester offers her his life, she replies: "And what of truth? You are deceitful sir!" She also leaves the audience in no doubt about the issue of being Rochester's mistress: she objects not for the sake of society, but for herself. When Rochester asks her "Who would you offend by living with me?" she answers, "I would." To his "You'd rather

drive me to despair than break a mere human law,” she gives the true Janian reply “I must respect myself!”

Rochester’s motif of powerlessness over her soul, but not her body, is also plainly voiced in an image taken from the novel. Kneeling before Jane, he exclaims: “I could bend you with my finger and my thumb. A mere reed you feel in my hands, but whatever I do with this cage, I cannot get at you. And it is your soul that I want.” This statement is enforced by his action of placing his hands around her neck as if to strangle her.⁹ He is stronger in body, but not in mind.

In accordance with their northern accents, which make these two lovers seem more realistic and brusque than in previous adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, Fukunaga’s Jane and Rochester have no pretensions about their feelings. They voice them clearly. Jane clearly lists her motivations for leaving: loss of trust, the immorality of being a mistress, and her self-respect tell her she deserves better. Rochester, meanwhile, expresses his despair at his inability to influence Jane’s strong mind. The power dynamics, also in accordance with Brontë’s novel, place Jane at the top of the hierarchy: her self-worth and determination to leave the man she loves give her superiority over Rochester, who begs at her feet. The only power he has over her, his physical strength, she takes from him as she leaves Thornfield.

What is interesting in all four adaptations is their shift in power: all adaptations give Jane complete superiority over Rochester; strengthened by an inward power that tells her she is doing the right thing. While the power hierarchies established in the first meeting varied drastically, the four adaptations all give Jane the moral high ground in the departure scene. The adaptations do differ completely in Jane’s motives for departure. In all adaptations, it is clear Jane must leave because it is the *right thing* to do. But over the course of time, adapted Jane’s motive shifts from a sense of duty to society and God to a sense of duty to herself. In the two 20th century versions, Jane seems to be urged to depart by the judgement of society and God looking over her shoulder. This effect is mainly achieved by leaving Jane’s motivations, the integrative functions of the narrative, wholly unsaid. In the 21st century versions, Jane becomes more explicitly individualistic. In White’s 2006 film, Jane’s panicked movements indicate her revulsion against Rochester’s proposals. In Fukunaga’s 2011 version, Jane actually voices the true reason for her departure: her self-respect.

⁹ See Appendix B for a still.

Chapter 3: Jane's Return

Jane Eyre's pre-final chapter is devoted to Jane's reunion with Rochester, and it describes their final power balance. It is the chapter in which the couple become engaged. To understand why Jane and Rochester marry and live happily together, Jane's motives must once again be investigated: her motives for coming in search of Rochester, and most importantly, her motives for marrying Rochester. Brontë established a perfect equilibrium between Jane and Rochester's powerful personalities, which enables the independent Jane to still be attracted to Rochester even though he is no longer the brusque, powerful patriarch she fell in love with.

The setting of this chapter is important. Ferndean is a secluded, grimy house, in an "ineligible and insalubrious site" (565). Its walls are decaying. As Jane walks up to the house the falling rain is the only sound. This sad place represents its owner's present state of mind: Rochester is despairing and wasting away. Jane, however, is calm and very much in control of the situation: she has become the assertive, strong woman she had the potential to be. She sees Rochester coming out of the house, and silently observes him. She then makes the servants fetch her trunk and fix her accommodation for the night before she visits her old master or asks his permission. When the servant prepares a tray for Rochester, Jane orders her to "give the tray to me; I will carry it in" (568). Jane thus immediately steps into the vacant authoritative role of the mistress of the house. The only sign of excitement is her shaking hands as she carries the tray to Rochester (568).

This authoritative, confident role Jane has taken up gets more pronounced when Jane confronts Rochester. The reader expects Jane to reveal herself to Rochester. Instead, while he frantically asks "*Who is it? What is it?*" Jane avoids answering for some time (569). Only when Rochester himself guesses she is Jane Eyre does she assent. This she does in the language of agency¹⁰: "I am Jane Eyre: I have found you out – I am come back to you" (570). With these words, Jane not only claims her identity, but also assumes the role of the hero who rescues the damsel in distress, or rather, the fallen gentleman.¹¹ A year before in the carriage to Millcote, Jane described Rochester's hand as "ever hunting mine" (350). The roles are

¹⁰ Agency here meaning having and using the power to act.

¹¹ As Jane did when she first met Rochester and helped him back up his horse.

reversed now, and Jane uses the discourse of power for her own actions: “I arrested his hand, and prisoned it in both mine” (570).

Jane teases Rochester to get revenge on his deceit of her about both Blanche Ingram and Bertha Mason. She tells the reader, and may also believe herself, that she “frets Rochester out of his melancholy” by giving him the “salutary sting of jealousy” (576, 580). However, her aloof behaviour as she allows Rochester to believe that she is going to marry St. John is more than that. It mirrors Rochester’s own attempt, a year before, to make Jane jealous. This speech preceded his proposal of marriage:

ROCHESTER. Where do you see the necessity [of going]?

JANE. Where? You, sir, have placed it before me.

ROCHESTER. In what shape?

JANE. In the shape of Miss Ingram; a noble and beautiful woman, – your bride. (329)

A year later the farce is repeated, but this time Jane is in control. The dialogue is almost symmetrical:

JANE. Where must I go, sir?

ROCHESTER. Your own way – with the husband you have chosen.

JANE. Who is that?

ROCHESTER. You know – this St John Rivers. (583)

Thus, Jane indeed frets Rochester out of his depression, but she also repays him for his former deceit. The flipping of the conversation signals the flipping in power structure, too.

Jane explains her return to Thornfield by hearing Rochester calling her name on the wind. This Gothic device, the aid of the supernatural, is presented as the only reason for Jane’s sudden return to Rochester. However, as Jolande Withuis argues in *Zomergasten*, Jane returns because she is now financially independent.¹² Her fortune enables her to go back to Rochester without being “kept by him” (350). The voice in the wind is the *deus ex machina* giving Jane an excuse to visit Thornfield. Jane stays and marries Rochester because she loves him, but her independence is also very important. Jane declares: “I am my own mistress,” by which she means she, too, can marry whoever *she* chooses (571). In addition, Jane wants to be useful; she wants to play as big a part in Rochester’s life as he does in hers: “I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector” (585). Rochester’s injuries partly

¹² *Zomergasten* is a Dutch TV-programme, in which famous or interesting Dutch-speaking people discuss their favourite film fragments. Jolande Withuis is a sociologist, feminist and a writer. This is a widely held view, see for example Rappoport, who says “most critics have focused on how Jane’s newfound wealth enables her to marry Rochester on equal or superior footing” (48-9), or Wood (99).

deflate his pride, and Jane takes up the role of caregiver and leader. Jane's care is the sympathetic kind, instead of the proud, self-sufficient one Rochester gave.¹³ As she remarks, the two are thus "precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result" (593).

1949: Franklin J. Schaffner

Schaffner does not spend much time on Jane's life after the interrupted wedding. Jane's absence from Thornfield takes one and a half minutes, and is comprised of just one long shot. Jane sits under a tree and speaks about missing Rochester. Sure enough, that very instance his voice is heard on the wind. Jane then dramatically exclaims that she is coming. In the next shot, she has returned to (the seemingly undisturbed) Thornfield. Her year with the Rivers family is left out. Here Barthes' theory again facilitates understanding the diversion from the novel. This distributional (linear) function of the narrative ensured that Jane met St. John, who arranged for her to get her inheritance from her uncle. By leaving out this part of the plot, Jane returns to Thornfield (ostensibly the same afternoon) as poor as she was when she first arrived there.

Nothing seems to have changed: the only indication that Rochester has had an accident is that he no longer blinks. Sinclair's Jane, too, slips back into her servile, subservient persona as soon as she sees him. She even makes her presence known by crying; she is not master of the situation. The "imprisoned hand," this time, is Jane's. Jane kneels at Rochester's feet, an action that clearly implies submission.¹⁴ Rochester sits there, with his arm around Jane, calmly saying his lines with a smile on his face. Meanwhile, Jane clutches his coat, sobbing. This couple knows nothing of equality: though Rochester is blind, he still has his Hall (only the west wing has been destroyed in the fire), his fortune, his hands and his "proud independence" (585). Jane, meanwhile, has not gained anything. She has no money, no independence and no family. She is still a servant, marrying her master. Rochester's epiphany when she left him, "You are stronger than me," seems to have been completely forgotten. Jane is still subjugated, and Rochester is still the dominant master he was at their first meeting.

¹³ For example, when Jane left to visit her aunt Reed, Rochester, well meaning but also crude, offered her far too much money.

¹⁴ See Appendix B for a still.

1983: Julian Amyes

Amyes' adaptation is usually very literal, but for *Ferndean* he has chosen a beautiful manor house in a park, not a rainy, hidden house in a forest. Barthes's catalysers are present: Rochester looks sufficiently battered, and Jane visits the servants first and orders them about. She uses the language of agency: "I am come back to you." She also happily proclaims her material independence, and her wish to be of use. However, the integrative function of the desperate Rochester, pining for Jane, is missing. Rochester turns away from Jane when she's planning to nurse him. "This is pity, not love," he barks, and then shouts at her: "leave me, leave me!" This fight in the middle of the reunion is a radical turn from the doting Rochester who "claimed [Jane's] services without painful shame or damping humiliation" (593). Dalton's Rochester is still the "proud independent," living in a sunny house, who "disdained every part but that of the giver and protector" (585).

Jane has flourished; she has received her inheritance and has become become independent. She now knows that she can be reasonably happy without Rochester: "Happy at Moor House I was" (513). Although Rochester starts a fight, she is confident in her teasing of him. Jane is ready to be Rochester's eyes, his right hand and his leader. Rochester, on the other hand, is very brusque, and seems too proud to be taken care of by anyone. While this attitude does ensure Jane's attraction to the dominant master-figure, it also clashes with Jane's new role of gentle mistress. Somehow, however, Amyes makes it work: Jane is not afraid of Rochester's outbursts, and Rochester gets to show his soft side when he proposes to Jane.

2006: Susanna White

White again uses images to help tell the story. Jane, after inheriting her fortune, gets called by the voice in the wind. When she travels to *Ferndean*, she is wearing a pretty cloak. Her bonnet has lace inside. While her clothing is still simple, it is more expensive than it used to be. Jane has independence now, and she is showing it. While she is walking up to the house, the camera focuses on the leafless trees around her. *Ferndean* is a sad, lonely place, in the middle of a foggy forest. Rochester, the angry man that stumbles out of it, fits into that picture precisely.

Wilson's Jane is not as composed as her original: at seeing Rochester, she starts forward, smiling. When she remembers he is blind, she stops moving, shocked. The scene with the servants is also cut out; thus we do not see Jane acting as the mistress of the house. She does bring the tray with water and candles to Rochester, and holds the glass to his lips. This is a caring and assertive move. Jane not only dresses better, she also voices her independence to Rochester, telling him how much money she inherited. She shows agency, too, when she bids Rochester goodnight: she lifts his chin and kisses him. Rochester seems pleasantly surprised by this: he has no problems with this confident, powerful Jane. Jane's smile shows that she delights in making Rochester jealous: she is settling a debt, and enjoys doing it. When Rochester asks her if St John ever proposed to her, she haughtily replies, "Aye, he asked me more than once".

White chooses to show the passionate side of this couple, and Rochester's final speech is an example of this. "Jane," he says, "I want a wife. I want a wife. Not a nursemaid to look after me. I want a wife, to share my bed every night – all day if we wish. If I can't have that I'd rather die. We're not the platonic sort, Jane." White shows how enlarging an integrative function (the sexual attraction) can alter the love story. Rochester's speech also clearly explains what attracts Jane in Rochester now that he no longer is the powerful independent master. Jane responds by saying: "Your life is not yours to give up. It is mine, all mine, and I forbid it." The two lie on the grass and kiss. Jane has taken the leading, dominant role in the relationship, hinted by her being on top of Rochester as they lie.

2011: Cary J. Fukunaga

Fukunaga chose to keep this scene very short. It does not take place at Ferndean; Rochester is sitting outside of Thornfield, under the remaining half of the chestnut of the proposal scene. The chestnut, when it was split in half, symbolised his separation from Jane. The remaining half seems to be the place he dreams about her. Fassbender's Rochester is the first in this study who truly looks desperate. He is but half dressed, unshaven, and has dirty fingernails. Most importantly, he looks like a man who has lost his purpose in life. Jane, in contrast, has a very rich garb, more colourful and stylish before. It clearly states her independence: she is a middle-class lady now. Jane is the benevolent lady who stoops to comfort a miserable wretch seated under the tree.

Jane has clearly shed her former Lowood dress and life, and although she was brought to Thornfield by the magic device of the voice in the air, she obviously wants to show that she now is a woman of some means. She treats Rochester as an equal by saying, “Edward, I am come back to you,” rather than the familiar “master” which Brontë’s Jane uses throughout this conversation. The scene ends straight after this climax, so we do not know if Jane will tease Rochester out of his melancholy. It is to be expected, though, because Wasikowska’s Jane already reproached Rochester for his deceitfulness after the interrupted wedding.

Jane has the upper hand in this scene, but Rochester seems to revive the moment he realises Jane really is standing before him. He does not make her kneel before him, but rather gets up himself. This action shows that Jane gives Rochester strength, and brings him up to her level of happiness.¹⁵ Brontë describes it as “all I did or said seemed either to console or revive him” (574). Thus Fukunaga hints that the perfect balance that Brontë described will be achieved; Jane will lead and revive Rochester, and Rochester will be the soul mate Jane has longed for.

These four adaptations form a remarkable hierarchy in the study of Jane’s return. From older to more recent, they divide the power more equally between Jane and Rochester. The 1949 version sees a return to the beginning power balance of the adaptation: Rochester is the dominant patriarch. This is less due to Heston’s portrayal of Rochester than due to Sinclair’s portrayal of Jane. Sinclair’s Jane is a weeping girl who can be subjugated by anyone, but especially by a strong personality like Rochester’s. The 1983 series, more modern, shows an independent and confident Jane, but Rochester is not very keen to give up his macho manhood and be nursed. He cannot live in a grimy home any more than he can assent to be dominated by the petite Jane.

As before, the 21st century adaptations set themselves off from their predecessors. In the 2006 and 2011 versions, in order to have a happy marriage, the crippled Rochester has to change his attitude. Thus, Rochester does not simply become a blind Rochester; he becomes a loving husband who trusts in Jane, as in the novel. The 2006 version shows a dominant Jane who good-naturedly leads Rochester. Rochester “knows no reluctance in profiting by her attendance,” because he knows Jane loves him (593). Fukunaga’s 2011 film creates the balance and “perfect concord” the original Jane mentions (593). Jane is a lady now, both materially and mentally Rochester’s equal. Her absence has made Rochester a hermit, but it is clear that her care and guidance will restore him to happiness. As the final shot shows, the two

¹⁵ See Appendix B for a still of this moment.

can lean on each other, and take equal comfort from each other. Fukunaga has created a Jane who can say, “I am my husband’s life, as fully as he is mine” (592).

Conclusion

Charlotte Brontë was ahead of her time. Jane Eyre is a thoroughly modern woman with her belief in self-respect and independence. She earns her own keep, as long as it is honest work. Jane cannot live without being self-sufficient. That is why Rochester has to change, and become a more modern man, before the two can be happy together. Their journey to the point where their power dynamics have reached that ‘perfect equilibrium’ goes through the three stages of the first meeting, the departure and the return. Stoneman says “it began to seem possible to analyze the reproduction of the famous Brontë texts in such a way as to give an ideological history of the culture which goes on reproducing them” (2). Thus, the four different adaptations, with their own interpretations of the importance and tone of these scenes, show how Jane and Rochester’s power dynamics were presented as the dream couple.

Barthes’s theory, adapted by McFarlane for film theory, shows how leaving out little details, such as giving Jane richer clothing, mean she appears as the same grey mouse she used to be before her inheritance. Bigger gaps in the plot, such as leaving out the Rivers family altogether, as Schaffner did, mean Jane does not inherit any money at all. All these little and great adjustments serve to make Jane and Rochester either into the balanced couple Brontë described, with Jane as the gentle mistress who dotes on her husband, or a hierarchical couple, such as Schaffner produced in 1949. Schaffner’s Jane has a temporary upper hand in power when she leaves Thornfield, but she loses this when she returns. Schaffner, catering to mid-20th century America, portrays the perfect couple as the adoring Jane with the sexually dominant Rochester. However, not all adaptations are so easily categorised. Amyes’s 1983 series focuses so much on Rochester and his regrets, that Jane’s character and motivations are slightly neglected. She seems to be in control when she leaves Thornfield, but the audience really only cares about the giant Rochester being brought to his knees.¹⁶ Her reasons for leaving Rochester are forgotten. At her return, Rochester even orders her to leave. Amyes is trying to combine an independent Jane with a Rochester who is too proud to be cared for.

In the 21st century, the adaptations cater more to the demand of the independent Jane. Interestingly, they also go back to the motif of the Gothic: they combine their modern heroine with old-fashioned Romanticism. White portrays a sensual woman, who yearns for a loving

¹⁶ See Appendix B for a still.

home. White recreates the same balanced power dynamic that Brontë used, by letting Rochester show his playful side, as he is not often allowed in adaptations. This makes Rochester more approachable and less brooding. In White's series, the couple genuinely seems to enjoy each other's company: not just in the sense of companionship, but also in a sexual sense. White makes explicit the things Brontë merely hints at, and this makes her adaptation a very convincing one for a 21st-century audience. Fukunaga has much less time to tell the story in, so he cannot use as much visual symbolism as White. Instead of mainly showing, Fukunaga also lets his characters voice their thoughts. This suits the overall tone of the film; Jane is a poor, plain girl, speaking English with a northern accent, preferring a life of hardship over an easy life as a mistress. Jane, when she returns, professes her independence and agency, and Rochester accepts that being led by Jane is his way to happiness. The Rochesters in the two later adaptations are transformed from a Byronic hero into a loving husband. Fukunaga's film, the most recent Jane Eyre adaption, has the most independent Jane. She speaks the words that make Jane the woman who has fascinated generations: "I must respect myself".

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Appendix A: Barthes's Theory of Narrative Functions Visualised

	<u>Distributional Functions</u> (events, actions)	<u>Integrative Functions</u> (scene settings, personalities)
<u>Cardinal Functions</u> (important)	Jane and Rochester's marriage	Jane is independent.
<u>Catalysers</u> (fillers)	Jane reads to Adèle, has her meals, listens to Mrs Fairfax.	Adèle's nursemaid, Sophie, always feels cold in England
<i>From Novel to Film:</i>	<i>McFarlane: Distributional functions are easily transported to film</i>	<i>McFarlane: Integrative Functions are harder to translate to the screen</i>

Appendix B: Stills from the Four Adaptations

1) 1949: Franklin Schaffner. Charlton Heston and Mary Sinclair.



Rochester and Jane Talking



Jane Kneeling Before Rochester When She Returns

2) 1983: Julian Amyes. Timothy Dalton and Zelah Clarke.



Rochester Begging Jane to stay



Petite Jane and Tall Rochester

3) 2006: Suzanna White. Ruth Wilson and Toby Stephens.



Jane and Rochester Conversing on Equal Footing



Rochester Kissing Jane on Her Bed

4) 2011: Cary Fukunaga. Mia Wasikowska and Michael Fassbender.



Rochester Clinging to Jane When She Returns



"I could bend you with my finger and my thumb"