

# The Development of a Byronic Hero: *Jane Eyre's* Rochester in Adaptations

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## Introduction

According to Teachman, "motion picture and theatrical adaptations are often the best gauge of how important a novel from a previous century has become to the popular sensibility of our times" (186). Following this train of thought, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) has remained one of the most significant published novels throughout the years, as "no decade has been without at least one new feature movie or television version of *Jane Eyre*" (Teachman 186). Each adaptation contains different interpretations and visions of Brontë's novel, making the content of adaptations often prone to change. One of such changes that is particularly interesting concerns the character of Edward Rochester. A variety of authors have written about Rochester's Byronic character in the novel as well as in adaptations. Stephanie Mendoza, for example, states that a transformation "occurs within the very nature of this Byronic hero" and he "changes from a superficial man to someone more genuine" (18). Sarah Wootton also focuses solely on Rochester and discusses a selection of adaptations, analysing his Byronic character. Mann argues that "filmmakers and actors must ensure that Mr. Rochester retains the brooding and temperamental nature that captivates Jane, while allowing modern audiences to see enough of his sensitive side" (152), which could be more difficult than first anticipated. Rochester is a Byronic Hero, but his complex character may lead to interesting results in screen performances, as "performers too become, in their way, the adapters and interpreters of the novel [...] as they mold the characters" (Stam 22).

Firstly, it is important to define and explain the Byronic stereotype. The Byronic hero descends from "a character based on Lord Byron's own characters" (Forina 85). Lord Byron, who lived from 1788 until 1824, was a poet who in his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* "[introduced] the prototype for future Byronic heroes" (Kimmel and Aronson 121). According to Stein, a Byronic hero is often "arrogant, contemptuous of human beings, bad-tempered [and] ruthless" (2). Baldick agrees and mentions that the Byronic hero "is a boldly defiant but bitterly self-tormenting outcast, proudly contemptuous of social norms but suffering for some unnamed sin" (n.p). In addition, Byronic heroes are "typically identified by unflattering albeit alluring features" (Forina 85). Finally, a Byronic hero "intertwines love and hate to shape [an] [...] all-consuming passion" (Snodgrass 45). With so many features it is difficult to establish a solid version of a

Byronic hero as they tend to differentiate per character, just as the opinions of scholars concerning the subject tend to vary. Because of this, this paper will focus on a selection of traits that scholars seem to agree on. These traits are his arrogance, unpleasantness, tormenting, a superiority over social norms and people, passion and an unappealing appearance. Rochester's character in *Jane Eyre* fits this description effortlessly: he has a rough appearance, is often unpleasant, and displays enough arrogance. In addition to this, he often demonstrates superiority for example when he deceives and upsets Jane on purpose, and his passion alongside his torment shines through especially during the first marriage proposal. However, what makes him unusual is that he is not a typical Byronic hero. In the penultimate chapter of *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's character shows drastic changes by deserting most of his Byronic qualities and as a result no longer fits the stereotype. Brontë wrote her novel during the Victorian era, and essentially made this character her own by tweaking it and thus not adhering to the Romantic standards.

Secondly, before analysing material out of adaptations it is important to address the matter of fidelity, with special notice to "the wider question of fidelity to what?" (Stam 15). In *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Robert Stam argues that fidelity in adaptations is "literally impossible" and that "a filmic adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium" (17). However, Geoffrey Wagner names three terms that can categorise and help with the issue of fidelity: transposition, commentary and analogy (McFarlane 10). Transposition occurs when a novel is adapted with little to no altering. Commentary indicates a situation in which alteration occurs "purposely or inadvertently" and "when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker" (Wagner 224). Lastly, analogy refers to "a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (Wagner 226). Wagner does not present clear definitions to his categorizations. While transposition can be rather easily defined, it is commentary and analogy who seem to conflict with each other. McFarlane explains that Michael Klein and Gillian Parker interpret commentary as "[retaining] the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly re-interpreting, or in some cases de-constructing the source text" (11). In addition to this, commentary could then "also be called a re-emphasis or re-structure" (Wagner 222). When it comes to analogy, Wagner explains that examples of such can concern movies "that shift a fiction into the present, and make a duplicate story" (226). In this case, an adaptation could for example be based on a Victorian novel but be set in a contemporary time with different character

names and an audience that does not necessarily connect to the Victorian author, which makes for an entirely different work of art. As analogy seems to be the most extreme category here and none of the three adaptations produce such a leap in time, it is expected that transposition and commentary are to be used mainly.

Rochester makes for an intriguing character. Therefore, this thesis will concentrate on the portrayal of Rochester's character in three adaptations from different periods, focusing on his Byronic qualities. These qualities are especially important to investigate as they form the foundation for Rochester's character. The earliest adaptation discussed here will be Robert Stevenson's 97 minute long version from 1944, starring the American speaking Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine. The second adaptation is the 1983 TV series directed by Julian Amyes, Timothy Dalton and Zelah Clarke. It is 293 minutes long and is thus the longest of the three adaptations, because it is a television series with eleven episodes. This could affect the analysis as Amyes will most likely have more time to incorporate different aspects of Rochester's character, but it will be interesting to see what choices he will make. The last adaptation discussed here is directed by Cary Fukunaga's and is from 2011, with a running time of 120 minutes. It stars Michael Fassbender and Mia Wasikowska. Stevenson's 1944 version is the only American adaptation out of the three. This could slightly affect the analysis on this version in the sense that it is a 1940's Hollywood film which may emphasise non-textual elements such as dramatic music or lightning, more so than the other two adaptations. However, this should not affect the final analysis. As all three adaptations are separated from one another by a considerable number of years, they may show time affects the portrayal of Rochester's character. Furthermore, this paper will be limited to three scenes from the novel that are to be analysed and compared in each adaptation. Each scene will be designated a chapter in which salient aspects of Rochester's Byronic character will be analysed. The first chapter will discuss Rochester's first appearance, the second Rochester's first marriage proposal to Jane, and the last his final reunion with Jane. These three scenes have been chosen for close examination as they portray some of the most vital characteristics of Rochester's Byronic character. However, it should also be noted that by focusing solely on these three scenes, other scenes will be left out, which might have depicted other features of Rochester's character. Thus, the thesis of this paper is that Rochester remains portrayed as a Byronic hero in each adaptation, but adjusted to each of their respective periods.

## Chapter 1: Rochester's First Appearance.

The first meeting of Jane and Rochester immediately paints a raw picture of Rochester's complicated character. Three of the Byronic qualities are at hand here: Rochester's unpleasantness, arrogance and unappealing appearance. Their meeting is intriguing: Jane remains unaware of Rochester's true identity throughout the scene, while he cunningly figures out hers. The scene presents itself as short and simple but in reality is anything but that.

The meeting takes place in Hay Lane outside of Thornfield, and rather immediately exemplifies Rochester's unpleasantness and arrogance. Rochester comes around the corner on his horse with his dog to his side and falls off in front of Jane when his horse slips on an icy patch: "a clattering tumble, arrested my attention. Man and horse were down; they had slipped on the sheet of ice which glazed the causeway" (133). When he first speaks, Jane hears him swearing: "what the deuce is to do now?" (133). When Jane offers him her aid, he makes it clear that he does not wish it: "you must just stand on one side" (134) and he assures her that he has "no broken bones, only a sprain" (135), refusing any help from her. He is visibly hurt, however, as he still needs to lean on Jane for support, which is an important part of the scene as Rochester is forced to accept Jane's help. What immediately stands out in this scene is that Rochester does not come across as a very pleasant man, nor as a typical literary hero. He heroically enters the scene on his horse, yet falls off and is arrogant and unpleasant.

However, what is most informative for the reader in this scene is Jane's description of Rochester's appearance. As Jane does not realise that this is her employer, her description of Rochester is very direct and honest. This is interesting, as they are not particularly flattering: "he had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now; he was past youth, but had not reached middle age; perhaps he might be thirty-five" (134). She goes on to say that if Rochester "had [...] been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, [she] should not have dared to stand questioning him against his will" (134). Jane describes his character using strong negative words such as "stern", "ireful" and "thwarted." Thus far, she describes the stranger as a rather unappealing man.

It should be noted, however, that Rochester does show interest in Jane which makes him interesting despite his lack of manners. When Jane eventually reveals that she is the governess, he exclaims, "Ah, the governess! [...] deuce take me if I had not forgotten! The governess!" (135) and continues to stare at her, seemingly intrigued. When he finally mounts his horse with Jane's help, he instructs her to "make haste with the letter to Hay, and return as fast as you can," (136) hinting at his interest for her to return to him.

These features are important for the establishment and development of Rochester's character as a Byronic hero. He swears, has a serious face and is obstinate enough to not require any help from Jane when he is in obvious pain. It is the start of his complicated and mysterious character, and therefore an important scene to investigate in each of the listed adaptations.

#### **1944: Robert Stevenson**

The first appearance of Rochester's character in Stevenson's black and white adaptation of *Jane Eyre* is undoubtedly one of the more dramatic versions. This version can mainly be categorised as Wagner's commentary because of its alterations. Firstly, Rochester is portrayed as an overtly heroic character, in his appearance as well as his interaction with Jane. In addition, the scene also heavily relies on its dramatised sound effects which announces the arrival of Rochester. This also emphasises his heroic portrayal.

Firstly, Welles' Rochester is depicted as a far more heroic character than Brontë's. When he falls off his horse, he does not curse, instead it is Jane who lets out a scream of surprise. He then claims to have injured his ankle when refusing Jane's help, yet he is perfectly capable of walking and mounting his horse on his own, whereas in the novel, Rochester mounts his horse while "grimacing grimly as he made the effort, for it wrenched his sprain" (136). As he does not seem gravely injured or in need of any direct help from Jane, the focus of his character is much more on his masculinity rather than his unpleasantness. This ultimately simplifies his character and takes away part of the mystery that is attached to it.

In addition, Welles' attempt at playing a stern and mysterious Rochester does not hold up for long as his appearance simply does not adhere to this type of character. Rochester's unpleasantness is presented when Welles tells Jane to "stand out of the way" (31:47) after she offers him help. However, when Jane insists on waiting till he is on his horse again, Welles' deep

and sensual voice betrays him when he turns to her and says "A will of your own. Where are you from?" (31:58) while looking at her deeply. They continue to share a moment where they speak to each other calm and kindly, followed by close up's of Welles' face. Jane seems swayed by every word Rochester utters while he stares at her intensely. Ultimately, Welles creates a definite hint of attraction between Jane and Rochester, which does not occur in the novel, as is proven when Jane comments "it was an incident of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense" (136). There may have been an unmentioned attraction in the novel, but it would have been subtle at the least.

Furthermore, music plays an important part in this scene. Stevenson does really well in creating a gloomy atmosphere using fog and "bells [that toll] an eerie warning" (Lodge, n.p.). The approach of Rochester is announced with the use of dramatic sound effects of horns which increase in speed, "as if announcing a king's arrival" (Lodge, n.p.). When Rochester arrives and his startled horse is seen, the dramatic orchestra playing reaches its peak and silences again when Rochester rises from the fog. According to Lodge, "virtually every sound or image in the scene serves to underscore Rochester's power" (n.p.). This could even be seen as Wagner's transposition, as Stevenson may have attempted to create the correct atmosphere for the arrival of Brontë's hero of the story.

When it comes to Rochester's unpleasantness, Welles' initially completes Rochester's Byronic trait. He shouts at Jane and immediately rejects her help. However, the overtly dramatic entrance may have been appropriate at the time, but it does not add up to the Byronic character. Rochester appears more heroic than unpleasant as he is uninjured, and in Welles' portrayal a stern and mysterious Rochester is seemingly replaced with a man who is able to almost hypnotise Jane with his sensual and deep voice.

### **1983: Julian Amyes**

The TV series adaptation from the BBC could be an example of Wagner's transposition, as it attempts to stay as faithful to the book as possible. This is most noticeable in the dialogue featured throughout the series, which follows the novel closely. Ominous music plays a part in this scene, but is mainly kept to a minimum and does not play the same role as in the 1944



version. Rochester's Byronic qualities are represented plausibly in this scene by Dalton, but the scene also faces some difficulties due to omitted dialogue and Rochester's appearance.

Timothy Dalton does well in capturing Rochester's unpleasantness in this scene. As argued by Wootton in *A Breath of Fresh Eyre*, "Dalton's Byronic credentials are immediately evident in his frequent oaths and raised voice" (234). When falling off his horse, the first words he utters are "damnation!" (22:58), clearly stressing his irritability with the situation. This may have been changed from the original "what the deuce is to do now?" (133) possibly catering for a modern audience. This can be accounted for with Wagner's commentary. When Jane offers help, Rochester does not let her finish and rejects it at once: "stand aside!" (23:02). He is visibly injured, and takes a while before completely regaining his composure. Throughout his dialogue with Jane, his frustration is evident as his every sentence is accompanied by him gasping for air from the pain.

The portrayal of Rochester's character also deviates from the novel here. Rochester leans on Jane for support, but this does not seem very urgent as he stands up straight most of the time, almost as if his arm around Jane's shoulder might as well have been placed there by accident. When Rochester finds out Jane is staying at Thornfield as the new governess, he mutters irritably "Thornfield? [...] Ah yes, the governess" (23:39). In addition to this, Rochester does not ask Jane whether she knows him and neither does he instruct Jane to hurry back. In the novel, Rochester's curiosity and interest are apparent when he learns that Jane works at Thornfield, and questions her. This lacks in the film and implies that Rochester may not be that interested in Jane.

Dalton delivers a faithful performance when it comes to Rochester's Byronic qualities. He is unpleasant when swearing and rudely refusing Jane's help, which also shows his arrogance. However, the omitted dialogue makes Rochester seemingly uninterested in Jane. While this may not make him any less Byronic, it does deviate from the novel where he does show interest in Jane. This can be accounted for with Wagner's commentary, where Amyes seemingly made a decision to alter the dialogue, possibly to make Rochester seem sterner. In addition to this, it can also be argued that Dalton is far too handsome to portray a man who is not handsome at all.

**2011: Cary Fukunaga**

The keyword in Fukunaga's attempt at recreating this scene in his adaptation is original. While part of the scene is faithful and adheres to Wagner's transposition, it also displays commentary: Rochester's Byronic traits are apparent, but the added dialogue also creates a new dynamic between Jane and Rochester. There is almost no music apart from a faint sound of rumbling clouds that send out a threatening atmosphere, which together with the foggy landscape creates a mysterious atmosphere for Rochester's arrival.

Firstly, Fukunaga's choice in actor for Rochester's character represents the Byronic features as described by Brontë. In the novel, Jane paints a picture of an unattractive man who has "a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow". In terms of appearance, Michael Fassbender's depiction of Rochester as a "greyhound lean, with a crooked cynical smile set in an angular jaw is very [plausible]" (Scott).

The scene stays faithful to the book for the largest part, yet the dialogue between Jane and Rochester has been altered almost entirely. When Rochester's horse falls almost on top of him, he barks "Up! Up you get beast! Up!" (33:19). He does not swear as is done in the novel but sounds aggravated as he shouts "stand back!" (33:25). When Jane offers to fetch help, he shouts at her again in a clearer tone of irritation "where did you come from?" (33:30) as he limps towards a rock to rest. When Jane explains that she is the governess at Thornfield, Rochester only repeats "the governess" (33:55). He does not engage further conversation on this topic by asking whether she knows the master of Thornfield Hall.

However, the last few lines in the dialogue before Rochester mounts his horse makes for the most interesting material in this scene with regard to his character. When he says to Jane, "You may help me yourself. Get a hold of his bridle and lead him to me" (33:58), Jane stares at the horse and back at Rochester, where upon he answers "If you would be so kind" (34:12), wearing a wry smile. When the horse resists, Rochester almost commands: "it would be easier to bring me to the horse, come here" (34:18). Once again Jane is not impressed and stares at him, whereupon Rochester continues in a sarcastic manner, "I must beg of you to please come here, miss governess" (34:23). Rochester is clearly irritated to be in this situation. However, the sarcastic dialogue between him and Jane here also paints an almost playful side to his character. As this slightly restructures the scene it can be listed under Wagner's commentary. This may have been done by Fukunaga to make Rochester more relatable and likable in the eyes of his

modern audience. The dialogue concerning Thornfield may be missing, but the alterations still give Rochester enough room to instruct Jane when mounting his horse: "make haste with your letter, who knows what lurks in these dark forests" (34:48), confirming his interest in her, much like in the novel.

This scene is of crucial importance in the novel as it is the first appearance of Rochester and an important establishment of his character. His Byronic qualities are in clear view and paint the picture of an unusual literary hero who is aggravated, injured and intriguing. Stevenson's 1944 adaptation depicts Rochester as a handsome and heroic man and his rude manners quickly turn into a romance when he addresses Jane. In Amyes' 1983 BBC series, Rochester's Byronic qualities are captured plausibly in terms of unpleasantness and arrogance. However, he seems to have a lack of interest in Jane due to dialogue that is left out. It is true that in the process of adapting a novel to film, it is often necessary to replace the novel's lengthy dialogue by visual clues. However, TV series often have more screen time than films. In addition, Dalton seems far too handsome to represent Rochester's rough Byronic features. In Fukunaga's 2011 adaptation, Fassbender depicts Rochester's Byronic features, anger and irritation well. Crucial dialogue is left out, but arguably made up for with Fukunaga's altered dialogue that restores Rochester's interest in Jane.

## Chapter 2: The Proposal

Rochester's marriage proposal to Jane is important in this study of his character as it highlights more Byronic traits. The lengths Rochester goes to to find out Jane's true feelings show his eccentric personality, and most importantly his superior and passionate feelings. He deceives and purposely upsets Jane in their conversation, which demonstrates his feelings of superiority, but also passion. More importantly, the underlying tone of torment in this scene stresses the Byronic quality within him.

The scene starts with Rochester telling Jane that the time has come for her "to rise and move on" (289). Jane is taken aback by this but recovers: "I shall be ready when the order to march comes" (289). He then continues fooling Jane into thinking that he is to marry and that Jane must leave Thornfield for Ireland, which leaves Jane visibly upset: "with as little sanction of free will, my tears gushed out" (290). After more taunting, Rochester finally reveals that he only plans to marry Jane: "I ask you to pass through life at my side - to be my second self, and best earthly companion" (293).

Rochester's Byronic trait of superiority is exemplified through his deceitful ways, which are very apparent in this scene. When Jane asks if Rochester is to be married after all, he replies "Ex-act-ly - pre-cise-ly: with your usual acuteness, you have hit the nail straight on the head" (289). By giving the impression here that he is to be married to Blanche Ingram, Rochester is trying to make Jane jealous, and almost seems to have pleasure in this by keeping Jane in the dark when he says "My bride! What bride? I have no bride!". When Jane replies: "But you will have" Rochester says "Yes - I will! - I will!" (292). He places himself above social norms by deceiving and purposely upsetting her only to lure out Jane's true feelings for him.

The scene also clearly portrays the passion Rochester holds for Jane. When he attempts to explain his true feelings to Jane, she initially does not believe him: "you play a farce, which I merely laugh at," to which Rochester replies: "But, Jane, I summon you as my wife: it is you only I intend to marry" (293). After Jane remains doubtful, Rochester continues to convince her of his love in which his passion is clearly noticeable: "You - you strange, you almost unearthly thing! - I love you as my own flesh. You - poor and obscure and small and plain as you are - I

entreat to accept me as a husband" (294). However, his torment is also visible within his passion. It is especially evident when Rochester mutters to himself after Jane has accepted, seemingly defending his decision:

Have I not found her friendless, and cold, and comfortless? Will I not guard, and cherish, and solace her? Is there not love in my heart, and constancy in my resolves? It will expiate at God's tribunal. I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment - I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion, I defy it. (295)

Overall, this scene is filled with characteristics that again exemplify Rochester's Byronic character. He firstly shows his superiority when he manipulates Jane and then later displays a strong passion for her, both qualities that resonate with a Byronic hero. His torment is also evident when Rochester mutters to himself in the passage quoted above, displaying his burdens. Moreover, by attempting to justify his choices, he again "[tries] to place himself beyond the constraints of conventional laws" (Forina 86). All of this points to a Byronic character.

#### **1944: Robert Stevenson**

Stevenson's adaptation is once again filled with dramatic performances which successfully emphasise his passion and desperation. However, the overall scene also faces some problems which can once again be labelled as Wagner's commentary. Due to an added scene before the proposal, Rochester's cunning character is prematurely revealed to the audience and the proposal scene does not have the same impact as in the novel. In addition, Rochester is again portrayed as a very masculine and dominant man, and added dialogue in the scene creates ambiguity.

In this scene, Welles' Rochester is again a heroic character. Only the novel's most important lines were kept to establish a Byronic Rochester, which makes the scene short. In the novel, the reader is fooled much like Jane into thinking that Rochester is planning to marry Blanche Ingram. Jane is also fooled by Rochester in this adaptation and his Byronic superiority is evident. For instance, when Rochester says to Jane: "Yes, I will. I will!" (1:16:18) he does so with intensity in his eyes that subtly implies his true intentions towards Jane while still deceiving her. His Byronic character is well represented here through his deception.

However, Rochester's superiority is also much less subtle as his motives are prematurely revealed. Rochester's feelings are exposed in a scene prior to the proposal. Here, he bluntly insults Blanche by stating she is only interested in his wealth, upon which she leaves. By creating a scene that exposes Rochester's true feelings to the audience, Stevenson diminishes Rochester's later conversation with Jane. Jane may remain deceived, but the audience does not: They now know that Rochester has rejected Blanche Ingram, and so his true intentions towards Jane are made much more obvious, which is also discernible in the added dialogue. When Jane comments that she had thought Rochester gone to London by now, he replies "I changed my mind, or rather the Ingram family changed theirs" (1:13:35). This may have been done to make the transition between scenes more natural, but Rochester's character also suffers for it: he now seems like a heroic character who proudly dismisses Blanche after a clever speech, and then seeks out Jane, announcing to her that the Ingram family has left. It once again simplifies his character.

Furthermore, when Rochester proposes, the scene does feel a little rushed. When revealing his true feelings to Jane, he says "answer me Jane, quickly, say Edward I'll marry you" (1:17:07). In the minute that follows, he continuously tells Jane to "say it" (1:17:09) and "read quickly" (1:17:11) and does not leave any space for her to express any thought whatsoever, resulting in a rather easily persuaded Jane. Stevenson's adaptation is in stark contrast with the novel, where Jane is also pressured, but she still decides at her own pace. Furthermore, this pressuring is not only meant to hurry Jane, but also to show Rochester's torment. However, there is no lengthy speech at the end where Rochester mutters to himself and justifies his choices, aside from three words: "God, pardon me" (1:17:19) which this does not seem significant. It heavily implies that he only hurried Jane simply because he could. The scene displays the same character as the first meeting did: a masculine and mostly dominant Rochester.

Despite all of this, Welles does succeed in portraying Rochester's passion for Jane, as "the pair's confessions of love [is] punctuated by Welles' wildly glittering eyes" (Gilbert 185) and the special effects create an intense and passionate atmosphere surrounding Rochester's character. The weather immediately intensifies the moment Rochester admits his true feelings to Jane, with "howling winds that suggests the onset of tempestuous desires" (Gilbert 185), and when Jane accepts him, thunder strikes in the chestnut tree nearby.

The scene is most definitely impacted by the different presentation of Rochester's character. Welles' portrayal of passion and superiority suggests Byronism, but the scene, in fact, once again conveys a different kind of Rochester. The proposal is rushed, and Rochester's deceit is not fully represented due to added scenes. However, had these alterations not been included, Rochester's character could still have been presented differently due to the nature of the film. The proposal itself "does feature a kind of operatic melodrama" (Gilbert 185), and so far Stevenson seems to aim towards a dramatic and heroic Rochester.

### **1983: Amyes**

Amyes' adaptation once again exemplifies Wagner's transposition by following the novel very closely, resulting in an 11 minute long scene in the seventh episode which includes minor alterations. Rochester's conversation with Jane first starts off within the walls of Thornfield, and continues when Rochester finds Jane outside of Thornfield, crying, which is where the first proposal takes place. Splitting this scene in two intensifies Rochester's dramatic first marriage announcement and divides it into a cunning conversation and a passionate proposal.

Rochester's superiority is flawlessly represented by Dalton through his cunning tricks. When Jane asks Rochester if he is to be married after all, he exclaims "Ex-act-ly! Pre-cis-ely! With your usual acuteness you have hit the nail straight on the head!"(5:09). In this first scene he speaks with a sly tone which matches the situation perfectly. Furthermore, Dalton is smiling for most of the event, depicting his satisfaction for his own clever tricks. Even more so, when Jane later starts to retaliate against Rochester outside, saying "if god had blessed me with some beauty and much wealth, I'd have made it as hard for you to leave me now as it is for me to leave you" (9:46), the camera stays with Rochester's smiling face for a significant amount of time, showing his satisfaction with Jane's feelings. His cunning personality really shines through.

The scene also depicts an effortless transition from superior cunning to passion. Rochester has nothing but passion in his voice for Jane: "if that boisterous channel and two hundred miles of land come bread between us, I'm afraid some chord of communion will be snapped, and I should take to bleeding inwardly" (7:37). His calm composure towards Jane creates an intimate atmosphere, and ultimately a sense of Rochester's passion. This continues after Jane confesses her feelings and retaliates against Rochester. Dalton rises and holds her arms

and then embraces her entirely, saying "So. So, Jane" (10:32) with his face in close proximity of Jane's, again vibrating a clear sense of passion.

However, it must be noted that Rochester's haste during the proposal, and his torment, are less pressing than in the novel. When he eventually proposes to Jane, he does not tell her that she must hurry her answer, or that she tortures him by waiting. Jane is given all the time in the world to decide. Rochester only slightly presses her on by saying "I must have you for my own, entirely for my own. Will you be mine? Accept me. Marry me" (12:35 but without a real sense of haste. Rochester only portrays his torment through his lengthy speech after Jane accepted.

Dalton represents a fitting Byronic hero through dialogue that depicts Rochester's cunning and passionate personality. However, Rochester's anxiousness and haste are omitted during the proposal, and he is portrayed as extremely calm. This does not necessarily make him any less Byronic as he still displays most of the traits found in the novel, but it does make for a far more grounded version of Rochester.

### **2011: Carry Fukunaga**

In Fukunaga's adaptation, the proposal scene has been kept short in comparison to the other adaptations, running three and a half minutes. A certain amount of dialogue has been omitted and this affects certain aspects of Rochester's character, yet Fassbender's body language is one of his strongest assets in this scene, and often speaks more than dialogue does. Jane confronts Rochester with the fact that he is to be married, to which Rochester replies "I see Mrs. Fairfax has intimated my intention to put my neck into the sacred noose" (1:16:47). Unlike the novel, Rochester is not particularly in control of the conversation here. When Jane walks away from Rochester, he looks down at the ground and then up to the sky, realising that his charade has come to a conclusion: it is time for him to be, somewhat, truthful and propose to her.

The sense of Rochester's torment and superiority has been significantly toned down by Fukunaga. When Rochester says that he will find Jane a new situation, she says "I'll be ready when your order to march comes" (1:17:06). She seems very calm and strong about the entire situation, and replies with standard answers such as "you must" (1:17:13) when Rochester asks if he really must lose her as a servant. She does not seem saddened by it either. Ireland is not mentioned, and so Jane does not mention that her new situation would be too far away from



Rochester. As this is omitted, Rochester does not manipulate Jane's feelings to the full extent and so his superior characteristics are not fully presented. When proposing to Jane, Rochester does not press her on like he does in the novel. He does not make her hurry or give the impression that time is short. His overall composure and body language slightly make up for this as the tormented look on his face does give a tormented impression, but the true Byronic undertone in his character is mainly lost here.

Compared to the other two versions, Fassbender's Rochester seems the most passionate. His passion and torment for Jane combine in the serious look on his face all the while when speaking. When asking her why she must leave Thornfield if it hurts her, he does so with a voice that almost seems to beg her. After revealing his true feelings to Jane, emotional violins play in the background that add up to Rochester's tormented passion. He explains that Miss Ingram is a "machine without feelings" (1:19:45), and the violins swell when he asks Jane to marry him. The scene ends with an emotional Jane and a yearning Rochester kissing each other as Jane accepts.

This focus on Rochester's desperation for Jane does not necessarily make him any more Byronic. The scene in the novel focuses on his unusual proposal and his deceptive attitude towards Jane. While Fukunaga partly shows Rochester's deception, it is clear that this scene is more dominated by his passion and desperation for Jane. As such, it leans towards Wagner's commentary as Fukunaga clearly had different ideas as to which of Rochester's characteristics were most important in this scene.

In conclusion, this scene shows Rochester's Byronic character in its prime: feelings of superiority, passion and tormenting. Stevenson's 1944 adaptation portrays Rochester's passion, but part of his deceit is lost due to an added scene which changes the balance of the proposal completely. He shows Byronic traits, but remains far too heroic. In the 1983 version, Dalton hits the nail on the head in recreating Rochester's Byronism through his superiority and passion, but also by staying faithful to the original dialogue. However, Dalton's Rochester's is far calmer as his tormenting is not a top priority in this scene. In Fukunaga's 2011 adaptation, Fassbender represents most of Rochester's Byronic character through his passion for Jane, with facial expressions that are filled with torment and passion. However, huge chunks of dialogue have been cut, which hardly leaves any room for his cunning and guilt, and so these are significantly toned down.

## Chapter 3: Jane's Return to Rochester

The reunion of Rochester and Jane is important in the study of Rochester's character, as this scene displays extreme changes in his character. In the novel, the earlier Rochester was an arrogant, rude and superior man, suggesting a Byronic hero. Yet in this event he seems a completely different man: his appearance indicates a drastic change, and the dialogue between Jane and Rochester confirms this. He seems a much weaker man and desperate, not out of torment which belongs to a Byronic hero, but purely out of longing for Jane. Brontë's changes make for an entirely different Rochester, one that does not necessarily fit with the stereotype of a Byronic hero. Ultimately, this scene exemplifies the unusualness of his character as a literary hero, as it shows that Rochester is not wholly Byronic.

When Jane first finds Rochester, his appearance indicates a transformation in his character. The Thornfield fire has robbed him of his eyesight, hand, and estate. When Jane observes him at Ferndean from a distance, she notes that the look on his face reminds her of a "caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished" and she notes a change in his character: "but in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding" (497). He looks like a broken man who has lost everything. As Jane watches, Rochester "advanced slowly and gropingly towards the grass-plot" (498). His cautious movements show that Rochester can no longer be the arrogant person he once was due to what he went through. Jane notices this as well when she wonders: "where was his daring stride now?" (498).

Rochester's weakened state and his desperation for Jane is more than apparent here during his interaction with Jane. When she enters Rochester's parlour pretending to be Mary, he immediately succumbs to the idea of Jane when she speaks: "Is it only a voice? Oh! I cannot see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever -- whoever you are -- be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!" (500). As Jane reveals herself, Rochester exclaims:

My living darling! These are certainly her limbs, and these her features; but I cannot be so blest, after all my misery. It is a dream; such dreams as I have had at night when I have

clasped her once more to my heart, as I do now and kissed her, as thus - and felt that she loved me, and trusted that she would not leave me. (500)

This perfectly depicts Rochester's state of mind. He is convinced that he is no longer entitled to anything, and yet at the same time he cannot deny his longing for Jane when she is so near.

In addition, Rochester's confidence has significantly dropped and he has thus become a much weakened man. When Jane announces that she will stay to take care of Rochester, he initially perceives this as pity, not love: "you understand one thing by staying with me; and I understand another" (502). However, he cannot seem to muster up his pride and send her away either: "No - no - Jane; you must not go. No - I have touched you, heard you, felt the comfort of your presence - the sweetness of your consolation: I cannot give up these joys" (502). He ultimately degrades himself due to his lost confidence.

These changes indicate that Rochester is no longer a typical Byronic hero, and that Brontë may have meant his character to rise above this stereotype in literature. In this scene is nothing left of his superior and arrogant characteristics, nor is there any guilt to feel burdened by. Forina argues that "Rochester is in a position of weakness and therefore his arrogance has disappeared". When Rochester loses everything, he is forced to let go of his unpleasantness, arrogance and other destructive Byronic qualities. The original Byronic stereotype is thus not at hand anymore, and it will be interesting to see how each adaptation deals with this change.

#### **1944: Stevenson**

The reunion between Rochester and Jane has been set up rather differently by Stevenson, where the overtly heroic hero remains the central focus. Jane does not find Rochester at Ferndean, but in the ruins of Thornfield Hall. Rochester enters the scene while leaning on his cane for support as he is blind, and there is a brief moment of passion when Jane and Rochester reunite. However, Rochester is not portrayed as a changed man in this scene and Welles' heroic depiction of him is still very apparent.

Firstly, Rochester does not seem like a weakened man in this scene. What stands out immediately is that "Welles limps through the ruins but is hardly the mellowed, chastened

Rochester [...] of Brontë's closing chapter" (Ellis and Kaplan 198). Instead, he immediately asks Mrs. Fairfax "what the deuce [she is] doing in this part of the house" and adds that "Adele is waiting for her supper" (1:34:07). He is blind and uses a cane for support, but his hand remains intact and he seems in control. Even though Rochester appears a wounded man, he is still living in his partly burned down estate and continues to give orders in his usual arrogant tone. After Miss Fairfax leaves, he demands to know who is in the room and angrily shouts "Who are you!" (1:34:31). This fiery attitude occurs again right after his joy at Jane's return passes and he once again barks at her: "Jane, all you can feel now is mere pity. I don't want your pity!" (1:35:10). Jane then begs him to not send her away, which automatically grants Rochester a position of power as he says "do you think I want to let you go?" (1:35:33), looking in her direction intensely. Then out of nowhere he passionately kisses Jane, upon which exact moment the dramatic music strikes. This intensifies the implied heroic ending where the heroic Rochester once again sweeps Jane off her feet.

There is a brief moment dedicated to Rochester's desperation in their reunion. When Jane answers that it is her and that she has come back for Rochester, she grabs his hands and kisses them while exclaiming "Edward, Edward!" (1:34:45). Rochester is shocked: "Her very fingers. What small soft fingers" (1:34:47). He then continues to intensely trace her face with his hands: "Her hair. Little flower-soft face" (1:34:55), to which Jane answers "And her heart too, Edward" (1:35:04). This only lasts for less than a minute, but it does resemble an intimate and tender moment in their reunion, and depicts change in Rochester's character by showing his vulnerability.

For this scene, Stevenson has seemingly chosen to keep the recurring theme of Rochester as a masculine and heroic character. The scene conveys contrasts with the novel, corresponding with Wagner's commentary as it is essentially restructured. It was altered in such a way that does not make Rochester seem like a weak man, nor does his character seem to have gone through significant changes. Apart from his limping and needing a cane for support, Rochester remains as Byronic as before, displaying his unpleasantness and arrogance. However, he also remains overtly heroic in this scene which does not necessarily add up to his Byronism.

### **1983: Amyes**

In Amyes' version, this scene follows the novel almost word-by-word which mainly corresponds with Wagner's transposition. As such, the scene is the longest out of the three, running 10 minutes. The event is, just as in the novel, spread over two days: Jane arrives at Ferndean and reveals herself to Rochester, and Rochester proposes to her the next day. Rochester's appearance clearly represents the change in his character, much like the novel. However, Rochester's character also shifts from angry to vulnerable.

Rochester's appearance depicts his weakened state. Jane observes the blind Rochester from a distance, much like in the novel. When the camera zooms in on Dalton's face, Jane and the audience receive the first hint that Rochester is no longer the same man. His face bears a tormented look and has an obvious scar that reaches from his forehead to down below his left eye, which is completely shut. In addition, his hair looks much longer than it did before, as if it has not been tended to for a significant time.

Rochester also displays his desperation for Jane. When he starts to realise that Jane has returned, he continuously asks for confirmation of her identity. He touches her hands and stammers in disbelief "Her very fingers. Her small, slight fingers" (11:41) and then embraces her while asking "Is it you Jane? What is it? This is her shape!" (11:46). Jane's head is positioned under Rochester's chin as he embraces her. Rochester eventually says "Such dreams I've had at night when I've clasped her to my heart as I do now, and kissed her" (12:07) and they share a tender but passionate kiss.

Rochester is also portrayed quite differently in terms of anger. When Jane announces she is an independent woman, Rochester replies "You have now no doubt friends who will not suffer you to devote yourself to a lame, blind wreck" (13:50), after which he turns away. When Jane says she shall stay with Rochester to look after him, he grimly says "This is pity, not love" (14:27). He then angrily shouts "Leave me!" (14:32). This turn of events makes for a far angrier Rochester, especially towards Jane. As he does not entirely succumb to Jane, he does not seem as powerless as in the novel, and it does not point towards a significant change. However, it is a plausible depiction of Rochester's state of despair.

After this, Rochester shows more of his changed state. When Jane leaves, he goes after her and tells her not to go: "I've touched you, felt you, heard you. I cannot give up these joys."

(15:39), which shows his vulnerable side. From this point on, Jane is in control. Rochester's vulnerability also shows when he asks about John Rivers' appearance, whom he then calls a "fair-haired Apollo" and himself a "Vulcan, black, broad-shouldered and blind into the bargain" (21:01), showing a clear lack of confidence.

This scene shows a clear change in Dalton's Byronic representation of Rochester. However, it also shows some ambiguity. Rochester's Byronic character is momentarily continued with his anger directed at Jane, and a moment later this is contrasted as he asks Jane to stay with him in a far softer and desperate demeanor.

### **2011: Fukunaga**

Fukunaga's scene once again emphasises Rochester's emotions, which are desperation and pain. It is also a rather short scene. Unlike the novel, there is no extra scene devoted to Jane's teasing. Instead, a fraction of a moment is dedicated to this where Jane says "Fairfax Rochester with nothing to say?" (1:53:20) with a gentle smile. This is the only line that indicates that Rochester has lost his self-confidence, unlike Jane. The rest of Jane's teasing is most likely left out either due to a lack of time, or more importantly, due to the fact that Fukunaga decided to primarily focus on the emotional and passionate aspect of the scene.

Rochester's appearance corresponds with the look of a broken man. One of the main differences with the novel is Fukunaga's decision to omit Rochester's amputated hand. While this decision "is a crucial one to some critics as dismemberment of a man's hand may symbolize a loss of masculinity" (Forina 86), it does not change the impact of his appearance. Rochester seems a lost man all the same. When he is first observed by Jane, he is sitting on a bench underneath a tree while resting his hand on his cane. His hair looks shaggy and neglected, and his thick beard gives the impression of a man who no longer looks after himself. As Rochester stares aimlessly into the distance, his eyes look cloudy, indicating that he is indeed blind.

In this scene, Rochester's weakened state is the main focus. When Jane approaches, Rochester asks "Who's there?" (1:52:13). His bewildered face bares the look of a man who is grieving and seems entirely lost. Jane remains silent at first, but then places her hand on his at which a slight gasp can be detected by Rochester, all the while accompanied by a soft orchestra. He gently places his other hand on hers, and whispers: "This hand" (1:52:43). In the novel, this

moment of touching each other is accompanied by plenty of dialogue that exemplifies Rochester's longing for Jane. While these are only two words that Fassbender utters, he does not necessarily need more. The tormented look on his face as Jane grabs his hand and places it on her face while he says with disbelief: "Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre" (1:52:58), conveys his pain, desperation and disbelief. This is also the only adaptation in this study where the scene is not concluded with a proposal. Instead, they share an emotional kiss. Rochester says "I dream" (1:53:55) to which Jane replies "Awaken, then" (1:54:01), and the film ends with their embrace.

Fassbender's Rochester clearly shows change in his Byronic character. Where he was unpleasant and superior before, he is now weakened and entirely inferior. The dialogue is scarce as the scene mainly focuses on Rochester's emotions and reaction to Jane's return. The scene has been restructured which can be labelled with Wagner's commentary. The dialogue may be scarce, but the scene clearly conveys that Rochester's Byronic character has changed into a weakened man.

Summing up, this scene revolves around Rochester's transformation. He changes from a Byronic character into a lost and broken man, losing all sense of arrogance, superiority and unpleasantness. It is an important scene in the study of his character and of equal importance in the adaptations as it defines his character so crucially. It is interesting how differently each adaptation conveys this scene. Stevenson's 1944 adaptation adheres to the overtly heroic Rochester and, as a result, no real change can be observed in his character. He has lost his eyesight and uses a cane for support, but he remains arrogant, unpleasant and does not seem weakened. In Amyes' 1983 version, Rochester's clearly changed appearance initially indicates his transformation, which is then further confirmed when he converses with Jane as he does not seem the same man. However, this scene is also ambiguous. Rochester shows the same unpleasant and dominant Byronic character as before, yet later he softens up, showing that not only his appearance has changed but also his character. Fukunaga's 2011 film finally depicts Rochester entirely different and stands in stark contrast to Stevenson's 1944 version. There is no trace left of a Byronic character, and the scene is entirely focused on Rochester's weakened and broken state, and his emotional reunion with Jane.

## Conclusion

Murray states in his *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era* that "a product of [Brontë's] fascination with literature of the Romantic era [is] her creation of Byronic heroes" (123). Her creation of Rochester is then no surprise. He is the hero of the story, yet he is a brusque man with stern features. He is arrogant, superior feeling and lacks manners. He exemplifies a Byronic hero. Rochester's first appearance and his proposal to Jane are both scenes where his Byronic features are clearly visible, as his actions and dialogue show. However, Brontë did not establish her hero entirely with this stereotype, as she "subjects it to unexpected transformations" (Murray 123), which becomes evident when Jane returns to Rochester and finds him a broken, vulnerable man. This change makes Rochester an unusual Byronic hero, and each adaptation has presented this in different ways according to their own interpretations.

This paper has closely examined three adaptations in an attempt to find out how Rochester's Byronic qualities were translated on to the screen. In the process, the theoretical framework as presented by Wagner has proven to be helpful in accounting for any alterations or omissions. For example, in the 1944 adaptation, Stevenson added in an extra scene prior to Rochester's proposal. This alteration restructured the scene, which can be linked with Wagner's term "commentary," rather than it simply being categorised as a violation of fidelity. After analysing each adaptation using this framework it is possible to assign each film with one of Wagner's categories. Stevenson's 1944 adaptation can be listed under commentary. While the film follows the same storyline as the novel, some of the alterations that are made are too significant for the film to be categorised entirely under transposition as the plot is often restructured. An example of this is the ending where Rochester shows no weakness or any sort of change in his character: he remains the overtly heroic character who still barks orders and overshadows Jane entirely. Amyes' 1983 adaptation is then easily listed under transposition. While the film experiences minor alterations, they do not necessarily restructure the story or change it. For example, Rochester momentarily defines himself through anger in the reunion scene with Jane which deviates from the novel, but eventually his changed character shows when he displays vulnerability and weakness. Overall, the adaptation is faithful to the novel and is presented as such. Fukunaga's adaptation is then mainly commentary. The story is not necessarily changed by the alterations made, but Fukunaga's own vision is made clear as she



seems to focus on certain aspects of Rochester's character. For example, the marriage scene seems to emphasize Rochester's vulnerability and passion towards Jane rather than any other emotion or dialogue, which happens in the reunion scene as well. This heavily implies that Fukunaga made a choice on what aspect he preferred to display in such scenes.

It has become evident that the representation of Rochester and his Byronic qualities in each adaptation is affected by their being from different periods. Stevenson's 1944 Rochester is Byronic, but is portrayed by leaning towards the overtly heroic and masculine side of this spectrum as he completely overshadows Jane throughout the film. It remains a constant feature in Welles' presentation of Rochester. However, this may be expected of his character in such a time period. For instance, Ellis and Kaplan argue that it was no surprise to find a "submissive Jane" as this film was made in "the post-World War II period [...] [where] women were now being told to go back into their homes and care for their husbands and children" (195). Stevenson's representation of Rochester thus caters to the audience of its time: in the end, his character does not shed his Byronic features, and remains the same. There is a different outcome for Rochester's Byronic character in Amyes' 1983 version. This Rochester is definitely Byronic, and seems to be captured in two extremes: one that is brusque and one that is gentle. For example, Dalton initially represents Rochester as a brusque man when he first meets Jane, as he is unpleasant and seemingly uninterested, which represents the Byronic element in Rochester. His more gentle side is especially evident during Rochester's first marriage proposal to Jane where he remains remarkably grounded and calm throughout the scene. A combination of these two sides is also apparent during his reunion with Jane, where he angrily shouts at her first, and later asks her to stay, showing his vulnerable side.

Fukunaga's 2011 version finally stands in a stark contrast with the oldest adaptation. It is caters to a modern audience. Fassbender depicts Rochester's Byronic qualities by being unpleasant and deceptive in his first meeting with Jane and proposal. However, it is also becomes clear that this character is presented on a far more emotional level. This is evident when he first proposes to Jane: the film leaves out most of teasing and focuses almost entirely on Rochester's vulnerability and his feelings for Jane. This also happens during his reunion with Jane, as the entire scene seems to revolve around his broken down state, followed by his emotional response and disbelief when Jane finds him. Brontë's Rochester did have a softer side,

but this did not dominate his character as it does in Fukunaga's adaptation and it seems to be a modern addition. It makes him far more approachable as a character, and could also help the modern audience "understand Jane's attraction to him" (Mann 152).

The differences in these adaptations subtly point towards the fact that each version seems to have a different perspective on gender roles which affects Rochester as a Byronic hero. The Byronic features that seem to be most consistent throughout these adaptations are Rochester's arrogance and unpleasantness. In each version, his character is built from these two features, whereas the expression of his other Byronic traits such as passion, appearance and torment seem to differentiate in each version. Each of these Rochester's is Byronic, but resonate different undertones. Stevenson catered his version toward a more traditional audience from 1940 in terms of masculine ideals in the portrayal of men, as explained by Kaplan and Ellis (195), while Amyes may have arguably tried to find a middle ground between this traditional view by showing Rochester's emotions after his angry outburst during his reunion with Jane. Fukunaga's adaptation finds itself in the 21st century with a far more modern audience, which may be an explanation for the frequent focus on Rochester's vulnerable side, in order to make him more relatable. These interpretations are interesting when considering the fact that Rochester's gender role was never typical to begin with. Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* in the Victorian era when men were associated with power, but Rochester does not represent a typical Victorian hero as he is "reduced to a figure [...] of powerlessness and vulnerability" (Murray, 123). As argued by Murray, Brontë's ideas were "not simply from a Victorian perspective but from one that is specifically woman-centered" (123). Jane becomes empowered as a woman, while Rochester changes in character to a weakened man. When connecting this to the categories of Wagner that have been assigned to each film, it can be established which adaptation comes closest to Murray's argument. Stevenson's 1944 adaptation is not in the least connected to this woman-centered perspective due to Rochester's unchanged heroic character. It is Fukunaga's adaptation that seems to adhere to this view due to the overtly weakened state of Rochester's character as presented in the end.

Rochester is an extremely well-written character who suits the Byronic role dynamically, with a touch of Brontë's own creativity. It is an influential character, which is evidenced by the fact that three adaptations can have such varying interpretations. The smallest change in a scene

can alter the atmosphere. Each adaptation is different and does not cater toward a woman's perspective only, as is exemplified by Stevenson's 1944 version. Instead, it could be said that each adaptation has grown with gender roles over time, as they show a chronological change in perspectives on such gender roles: starting with the heroic stereotype of a man as was expected in 1940, and ending with a remarkable sensitive Rochester in 2011. Each adaptation seems to have adhered their interpretation of a Byronic hero to their respective period and altered them accordingly, yet even here the persistent Byronic traits of arrogance and unpleasantness mostly remain. Therefore, it can be concluded that despite differences in portrayal and interpretation, all three Rochester's resemble a Byronic hero fitting for each of their respective time-periods.

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