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**My Freedom is a Non-Negotiable Right: The Portrayal
of Independence in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and
its Film Adaptations**

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Abstract

Jane Eyre is widely known for being a revolutionary nineteenth-century feminist novel. Its main character is a governess who pursues her own identity and independence, not only in financial terms but also in an ethical sense. The figure of the governess was highly important and grew significantly throughout the century. This figure was considered a socially acceptable means for women to earn a living but, ultimately, this career choice was rarely something women *really* desired to do. Victorian moral and aesthetic standards play a key role in the development of the novel. Jane Eyre finds herself in a world where girls like her cannot have her own identity, as women were always subordinated to men. By having as main sources five film adaptations of the book (1944, 1970, 1996, 1997 and 2011) my research seeks to analyse how the character of Jane Eyre is depicted in every film and how the concept of independence is treated in comparison to the novel. In *Jane Eyre* there are a few episodes that profoundly affect the heroine; these episodes will make her grow into a woman who does not conform to what society dictates. Finally, the current study also aims to detect the purpose behind certain omissions that some directors make in their films. Some of these omissions actually refer to episodes that are crucial in order to provide an answer to the thesis statement.

KEYWORDS: *Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, Victorian Literature, Film Adaptations, Femininity, Womanhood, Independence.*

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me.

I am a free human being with an independent will” (Brontë, 1847: 303).

0. Introduction

0.1 Context and objectives.

Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* can be considered as one of the greatest feminist novels of the nineteenth century. In the novel, the heroine aims to seek for her ethical and economic independence even though she lives in a strong patriarchal society.

Women’s position during the Victorian Era was clearly submissive and inferior. They did not have the right to choose over their actions and they had to strictly follow the solid rules that patriarchal society had established. Conduct manuals were distributed among the ladies of higher social classes in order to instruct young girls how to become a lady. Nonetheless, young girls coming from lower classes had to settle for receiving a poor education, if possible. Some were sent to work as governesses to upper-class families in order to provide an education to the children of the house. In other words, they had to stick to be housewives and their participation in the public sphere was highly limited. Furthermore, they would always depend on a male figure: their father, brother or husband. Hence, they could not attain complete independence and their free will would always depend on others.

In the case of *Jane Eyre*, we discover the figure of the governess. A role that was mostly fulfilled by young girls who needed to find a job in order to earn a modest quantity of money. Governesses were also expected to be submissive to their male masters, since they were the ones who provided them with food and a shelter.

After the publication of *Jane Eyre* it became a possibility that women could aim to be independent as *Jane Eyre* did in the novel. This is what has brought me to the point to start this research. Women have the possibility to fight for their rights and to rebel against the moral standards that limit their freedom.

So, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the position of Jane Eyre as a governess and how she achieves moral and economic independence. Additionally, I also aim to analyse how Jane is depicted in different screen adaptations. My initial thought was to concentrate only in the novel, but then I realised that it would be interesting to see how femininity is represented in different films of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

To do this, I have accurately read a great number of articles and chapters in books both regarding the novel and the film adaptations. This has lead me to organise this paper in two main parts. In the first one I have paid close attention to a variety of topics related with womanhood, femininity and independence that are portrayed in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. For each subsection my main guides have been the novel and its critical material. In the second part I attempt to analyse how the same topics that I have examined in the first part are depicted in five film adaptations and the changes they suffer within the different decades. In addition, I have been able to observe that some of the crucial parts of the book that are essential in Jane's story are often omitted in screen adaptations. Thus, faithfulness to the original source is broken and this can be due to the choice of the director. They are the ones who determine which scenes will be the ones to be discarded in the movie. Nonetheless, these absent scenes are often the parts in which I would like to focus in order to do this research. This omission, as we will able to see, can also be due to the historic and cultural framework of the moment in which the film was released.

Finally, I would like to state what my final research question is: to what extent can Jane Eyre be considered an independent governess and how this is portrayed in its film adaptations. To uncover this, in the upcoming sections I will provide a close analysis of both Brontë's novel and its screen adaptations so as to deliver a satisfactory answer to this question.

0.2. Literature Review

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is often read as a feminist and sentimental novel whose main character struggles to overcome the moral standards of Victorian society. Jane finds herself in a position where she wants to seek for her own ethical and financial independence, but she finally falls into what society has planned for her. Still, it is not until she has reached a certain degree of independence that she decides to go back to Thornfield. However, the main goal of this paper is to compare how independence and femininity are portrayed both in the novel and in its film adaptations. I will proceed to analyse what critics have said about the representation of few relevant themes such as women's education, the figure of the governess, independence, identity, etc. In addition, all of these topics will be considered in relation to what was expected of women in the 19th century – reinforced through the period's conduct literature manuals – to inspect the ways in which these aspects are developed in the screen adaptations.

Firstly, education plays a very important role in Jane's story: it is thanks to the education she receives at Lowood that she is a governess and, by consequence, meets Rochester. The lack of education would have probably had an opposite effect to her life. Jane is a very intelligent character and from a very young age she displays a feeling of rebellion against the organization of social classes. Yet, as Bell claims, "she suffers precisely because she knows the value of caste; she may be poor, but she does not want to belong to the Poor" (1996: 264). Apart from this, we can also observe that she does not only defy the social class structure, but also the characters that make her feel inferior in a way or in another. Jane's resolute social defiance is reinforced in Bossche's article: "against being labeled a liar by Brocklehurst, against the tedium of her career as governess, against being made a mistress by Rochester, against being sacrificed to St. John River's ambitions" (2005: 47). The education that girls received during the 19th century was always related to the manners and gestures that women should adopt in order

to be “competent ladies”: Many of these texts were penned down by male authors, whose aim was to instruct their female readers on their womanly duties and proper behavior” (Öktem, 2016: 125).

Secondly, one of the most important and undeniable topics is the figure of the governess. They were private teachers who worked for an upper-class family. They had to be “a well-bred role model for the children in her charge, but she had to be poor enough to need work for a living” (Gilbert, 2015: 458). In Jane’s case, it is her decision to leave Lowood and become a private governess. She wants to achieve a certain degree of independence, even if that means working for someone else. As Owsley affirms, “Jane’s decision to seek employment was made out of desperate haste in an attempt to articulate her identity outside the Lowood School” (2013: 60). Governesses were not a part of a family, but they were not considered servants either. This idea also appears in Gilbert’s study, where she states that this created “a sense of alienation from the world” (2015: 465).

Thirdly, regarding the film adaptations, researchers such as Fanning argue about the decision of choosing Joan Fontaine to represent Jane Eyre in the 1994 film. Jane was supposed to be plain, simple and not very beautiful. Nevertheless, Fontaine is the clear opposite of what Jane was supposed to look like: “Fontaine’s portrayal of Jane is cloaked in this “corrective” ideal of wartime femininity, a depiction that manifestly revokes the valiant feminism that has famously become associated with Brontë’s Jane” (Fanning 2018: 44). What is more, Jane’s decisive moment of leaving Thornfield in order to find her inner self after the failed marriage with Rochester is often forgotten. The episode with the Rivers is not always represented in the films, or, if it is, it is not faithful to the book. Additionally, the depiction of the character of Mr. Rochester is also different throughout the different adaptations depending on the contemporary public. For instance, as Mann recalls “he must be sufficiently caring and concerned” (2011: 153). Last but not least,

Jane's relationship with her master also changes. Riley compares this in his article and concludes by saying that Stevenson's film (1944) and Mann's (1970) differ in this subject. Stevenson adds "broad strikes of romantic melodrama" (Riley 1975: 151), while Mann discusses Jane's episode at Thornfield as a new opportunity to her.

To conclude, experts have revolved around a great deal of topics. They may or may not be depicted in the films, but their importance is undeniable. Nonetheless, the episodes where Jane lives at Gateshead and her stay with the Rivers are often played down by film directors. Further research will be needed in light of the study concerning the implications that the characters of St. John and Brocklehurst have on Jane.

1. Womanhood and Independence in *Jane Eyre*.

1.1. Conduct Literature and Jane's Moral Development.

Conduct literature is a literary style whose aim was to instruct girls and women in order to become "proper" ladies. This genre originated when Queen Elizabeth I implemented the Protestant religion in the 16th century. Manuals, transcripts, and even books had the intention to show women their weak nature, establish an "accepted" behaviour and define their role in patriarchal society. One of the most famous conduct manuals was the one written by Thomas Gisborne in 1747. In *An Enquiry to the Duties of the Female Sex*, Gisborne writes: "The duties of the female sex, in general, are the objects which it is proposed to investigate" (3). These so called "duties" and roles can be considered as one of the main topics in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Firstly, I will proceed to analyse the genre of conduct literature in general terms. As a consequence of the social changes that were taking place in England, including scientific progress, industrial revolution, immigration and the expansion of colonialism, a new social distribution where the role of both genders was perhaps unclear was

introduced. In the light of the new English “society” it became imperative to provide moral consciousness for each gender: “Englishmen of the early modern period were overwhelmingly interested in instructing women on almost every aspect of their daily lives” (Ökten, 2016: 125). This instruction covered a great amount of conditions: behaviour, feminine ideals concerning beauty standards, misogynistic portrayals, family relationships, and so on. Women were expected to be loyal, kind, caring and devoted to their husbands and families. They were the ones in charge of the housework and they were not often allowed to make their own living. Single women were not socially accepted as marriage was considered to be one of the goals every woman had to achieve.

Secondly, I will proceed to exemplify all the characteristics previously mentioned in comparison to the novel. Jane is described as someone simple and plain. The idea of beauty was something important during the 19th century. We need to take into account that Jane is not one of the most beautiful female characters in the novel. For instance, even the pronunciation of her name makes us recall her as someone invisible, not strong. Women had the social pressure to look beautiful. As Talairach-Vielmas suggests, Jane also feels this pressure and she compares herself with other feminine characters (2009: 131). She looks up to Blanche Ingram and sees her as someone superior as someone comments on her. With this in mind, it would be important to remember that Mrs Fairfax gently asks Jane to dress up with her nicest dress to meet her master, Rochester: “You had better change your frock now” (Brontë, 1847: 140). Regarding Jane’s behaviour, in the very first part of the book she lives with the Reeds. They are the only family that she has left, as both of her parents died. In Gateshead her aunt and cousins are mean to her. She is considered as someone inferior by most of the residents of the house with the exception of Bessie. Jane is always told what she has to do and how. Furthermore, her cousin John Reed usually mistreats her, and when she tries to beat him back, she is punished and often told that she is evil:

“Hold her arms, Miss Abbot: she’s like a mad cat”
“For shame, for shame!” cried the lady’s-maid. “What shocking conduct Miss Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your benefactress’s son! Your young master.”
“Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?”
“No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There, sit down and think over your wickedness”. (Brontë, 1847: 7)

Her position in the family is paradoxical, as is the one she will have during her journey at Thornfield: she is neither a part of the family, nor a servant. Jane, in the novel, reflects on women’s behaviour. She has always been put in a position of submission regarding men: firstly, with her young master John Reed, secondly, she was under the orders of Mr Brocklehurst, thirdly she was the governess of Rochester’s pupil and finally she lives with the Rivers, where St Johns is the master.

We must not forget the moment when Aunt Reed invites Mr Brocklehurst to Gateshead. There, he examines Jane’s attitude; Brocklehurst has been told that Jane is an evil little girl who beats her cousins and lies repeatedly. In addition, he has also been asked by Aunt Reed to bring Jane up “in a manner suiting her prospects” (Brontë, 1847: 34).

It is during her stay as a governess where she thinks about patriarchal society and women’s inequalities:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; [...] It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom had pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë, 1847: 129)

She fully acknowledges her position, but always with a feeling of uncertainty. She wants to be free from moral standards. As for her position as a governess, she is regularly asked to drink tea with Mr Rochester and to spend time with him when he wants to.

In conclusion, women were always subordinated to male authority. From their early years, girls were asked to have a proper behaviour towards men. Moral standards

were something ladies had to follow without complaining if they wanted to be accepted by their society. In the novel, Jane sees herself in a position of inferiority. Her character can be defined as someone strong, brave and thoughtful. She tries hard to break established standards, but she always ends up following them.

Now, we will move into the next part of this paper. There, I will analyse the topic of education as it is portrayed in the novel. Education in *Jane Eyre* can be also linked to the subject of conduct literature.

1.2. Education in the 19th Century and in *Jane Eyre*.

After dealing with the concept of conduct literature, we will now continue with the treatment of education. In England the way of educating wealthy children and poor children was radically different. Social status was crucial in determining how and why children should be educated.

On the one hand, wealthy boys were allowed to go to boarding schools over the age of seven. They were sometimes sent to “Ragged Schools”. As for the girls, they received home-schooling. The ones in charge of girls’ education were the governesses. Girls were taught French, drawing and music among others. On the other hand, poor children did not have the opportunity to go to school, and if they did it would be at “Sunday Schools”.

In Brontë’s book, education is one of the most important topics. Jane is a poor orphan who lives with her aunt and cousins. In Gateshead, Jane spends most of the time hiding and having a look at books; it is the only moment where she feels peaceful. Since she was considered a “guest” at the house, the books do not belong to her and John Reed is extremely aware of it: “You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none” (Brontë, 1847: 5). Hence, Jane is always reminded of her condition of inferiority.

When Jane Eyre is taken to Lowood she is given the chance to learn. During the 10 years at the Institution she will learn how to control her anger and how to behave like a lady. In the book, the educational process is explained as a chance but also as dark years of suffering. Jane is not happy to be there, even if education will make her “free”: “Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold; we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes, and melted there” (Brontë, 1847: 66). Added to the fact that the clothes were deficient, girls that received education in institutions also suffered from famine. According to Talairach-Vielmas, “Charlotte Brontë’s linkage of her heroine’s desire to conform to specific standards of beauty with her relationship with food typically recalls Victorian feminine practices” (2008: 134). Jane usually evokes that girls in Lowood were not nourished adequately. However, Jane affirms that during her stay she has learned many valuable things:

During these eight years my life was uniform, but not unhappy, because it was not inactive. I had the means of an excellent education placed within my reach, a fondness for some of my studies, and a desire to excel in all, together with a great delight in pleasing my teachers, especially such as I loved, urged me on. (Brontë, 1847: 97)

Her educational progress can be defined as bittersweet. At Lowood, she is under the orders, again, of a man. Brocklehurst is a very unpleasant master. Nonetheless, she makes some good friends that also help her become a full grown-up: Helen Burns and Miss Temple. First of all, Helen Burns is the first friend Jane has at Lowood. Jane confides in Helen and genuinely trusts her with all her secrets. The two girls exemplify the notion of female solidarity, as they fully support one another. Miss Temple also proves to be a good friend to Jane. According to Gilbert, the name of Lowood’s most caring teacher reminds us of a Greek temple in order to balance the unfriendly personality of Brocklehurst (1979: 344-345). From Miss Temple Jane learns to calm her rage and find inner peace: “her friendship and society had been my continual society; she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess and latterly, companion.” (Brontë, 1847: 97). To sum

up, these two characters can be considered, for Jane, as family members who play an important role in her turning into an adult. In fact, critic Violeta Craina claims that “Jane’s moral dimension originates in her meeting with Helen Burns” (2015: 45).

Apart from Jane’s evolution at Lowood, it is important to stress the importance of her stay at Thornfield, where roles change and she is the one in charge of education. Jane’s first feeling of independence can be placed at the point where she leaves the institution in order to work as a private teacher of a little girl. She will take another step in life when she moves to Thornfield Hall. Adèle becomes Jane Eyre’s student and as an upper-class child, she will receive education by the means of home-schooling. Mrs Fairfax introduces Jane to Adèle by reminding her again of what she is expected to become: ““Good morning, Miss Adela”, said Mrs Fairfax. “Come and speak to the lady who is to teach you, and to make you a clever woman some day.”” (Brontë, 1847: 118). Jane will teach Adèle the same she was taught when she went to school. Her objective is to make her pupil an ‘acceptable’ lady. The first days of teaching are not as easy as Jane predicted but, as time goes by, Jane is able to teach Adèle and see her evolution: “she soon forgot her little freaks, and became obedient and teachable” (Brontë, 1847:127).

In conclusion, education is what gives Jane the opportunity to pursue her dream: being an independent woman. Even if little Jane was a rebellious girl who sought for change, she is able to control her rage and become a modest young adult. With her new job as a governess she achieves economic independence but she is still subordinated to a male master.

After having dealt with the topic of education and the role it plays on the female protagonist, we will continue with the analysis of the figure of the governess. Jane makes a living from being a private teacher and her position will bring up some aspects that are crucial for my research.

1.3 The Role of the (In)Dependent Governess.

As I mentioned before, we will now deal with the figure of the governess. I will focus on how governesses lived during the 19th century in England and how this is represented in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. As an overall impression, it is important to mention that governesses became popular after the 1st World War but in the case of England it was not until the end of the 18th century and the early years of the 19th when the number of governesses became noteworthy.

Firstly, I will proceed to define the role of governesses. They were young girls who worked as private teachers in upper-class families with the objective to give an education to the children. As Nora Gilbert states, a governess "had to be a woman of a high enough caste to qualify as a well-bred role model for the children in her charge, but she had to be poor enough to need to work for a living" (2015: 458). Governesses were allowed to live with the family, but they were not exactly considered a part of it, nor part of the servants. This idea is recovered by Gilbert as she explains how Jane Eyre finds herself in this paradoxical position:

As M. Jeanne Peterson points out, every Victorian governess received strikingly conflicting messages (she was not a member of the family, was and was not a servant). Such messages all too often caused her features to wear what one contemporary observer called "a fixed sad look of despair". (1979: 349)

Charlotte Brontë was completely aware of this, as she also had to work as a governess during her life. Brontë knows what she is writing about and we could think that some feelings are shared with Jane Eyre: "Teaching, of course, was one option for such a girl as it was for Charlotte Brontë and her sisters" (Bell, 1996: 264). What is more, all these young girls usually wrote diaries and letters, as Jane did, to make a record of their journey as teachers (Gilbert, 2015). Writing was their only way to "escape" as they had few communications with the outer world.

Secondly, I will now go over Jane Eyre's years as a governess. After receiving an education at Lowood Institution and working there for a short period of time, Jane Eyre decides to give up her position as a teacher and finds a new position as the tutoress of an orphan middle-class child.

When Jane Eyre arrives at Thornfield she is received by Mrs Fairfax, whom Jane assumes is the owner of the house. She soon discovers that Thornfield Hall belongs to a man, highlighting patriarchy and marked gender roles in Victorian England. Her pupil, Adèle, is a young girl who has recently arrived at England. She needs someone to teach her how to become a lady. Jane's work at Thornfield mainly consisted in teaching and spending time with young Adèle:

I found my pupil sufficiently docile, though disinclined to apply, she had not been used to regular occupation of any kind. I felt it would be injudicious to confine her too much at first; so, when I had talked to her a great deal, and got her to learn a little, (...). I then proposed to occupy myself till dinner-time in drawing some sketches for her use. (Brontë, 1847: 121)

However, apart from her time with Adèle what I am most interested in is the love story between Jane, a nineteen-year-old governess, and her old master. When she meets her master she "does the best to perform middle-class femininity so that she will be accepted as a governess" (Godfrey, 2005: 858). As I mentioned before, her social status was lower than her master's, so she had to do her best at pretending she was the adequate person to perform the task of governess. Their love story begins the first day they met, and despite the fact that it was not very common that masters fell in love with their governesses in real life (Gilbert, 2015), this literary genre became more popular.

This sort of stories "appear to reinforce the subservient role of the female as child, as student, as victim and the dominant role of the male as a father, as teacher, and as aggressor" (Godfrey, 2005: 860). We should not forget that patriarchy was the main family "institution" and male power over women was extremely prominent. This love

story also makes the difference between social classes more visible: Rochester is an upper-middle class master with a gigantic mansion, while Jane is a plain orphan girl. In addition, Jane works for Mr Rochester, she is his employee. Hence, she has to moderate her attitude and as Godfrey declares: “Jane must bear Rochester’s orders of when to stay and when to go and when to speak and when to be silent. He is clearly her “master” and she responds to him with the difference expected by one in his position” (2005: 865). Her attitude towards Rochester is always moderate and this is how it is described by Jane in the novel: “I know I must conceal my sentiments: I must smother hope; I must remember that he cannot care much for me” (Brontë, 1847: 208). As for the marriage proposal, Jane has made the decision to leave Thornfield, as she knows that she cannot fall in love with her master. In this passage Jane shares her feelings for the first time:

Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? (...) Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have much as soul as you – and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. (Brontë, 1847: 303)

Rochester does not tolerate a refusal; he begs her to become his wife. Jane is reluctant but she finally accepts the proposal. Nonetheless, governesses were not supposed to marry their masters, as they came from different social classes.

To conclude, Jane’s position as a governess highlights the economic and social differences between employees and employers. Readers at that time were surprised to see how a poor governess has been able to move up from a lower to a higher position in the social hierarchy by means of marrying her owner. What is relevant for my research is that Brontë portrays Jane as economically vulnerable but also as a young lady with powerful personality and with great determination.

After this section, we will move into the next one, where we will analyse how Jane finally reaches ethical and economic independence.

1.4 Women's Independence in the Victorian Era.

The present section will cover how independence is portrayed in Brontë's novel through the character of Jane Eyre. I will, first, proceed to go through the book in order to analyse how Jane Eyre achieves her goal as a child: become an independent woman.

It is since Jane's early age that her anger and rebellion make us think of her as a girl willing to achieve a certain degree of independence that women could not have in the 19th century, basically because of their gender. These feelings of rage which started when she was living at Gateshead are crucial for her personal development into the person she will become. Regarding the other feminine characters in *Jane Eyre*, Owsley points out the differences between women from different social classes:

Charlotte Brontë's feminine characters are written from a gendered societal station which explicitly hinders agency and self-subjectivity. The women of *Jane Eyre* fall into two not altogether distinct categories: women who rely on a wealthy husband for domestic comforts and women who rely on wealthy, male employer for domestic survival. (2013: 56)

Jane Eyre's main aim in life is to be independent: "Her unsubmitiveness, her independence is her social fault" (Bell, 1996: 263). Despite being dependent on her aunt during her childhood, she soon rebels and the need for independence grows in her. She seeks her own employment and she makes her own decisions. We first see this when she moves to Thornfield: she wants to work in order to have a salary and be economically independent: "her search for autonomy takes her from her teaching position at Lowood, where she remains dependent on the institution for food, clothing and housing" (Owsley, 2013: 59). There, even though she is paid by Rochester, she depends on him. Rochester is her master and Jane, as we commented on before, is aware of it. When Jane is told that her Aunt Reed is dying and wishes to see her, Jane needs to ask for Mr Rochester's permission, as he is her owner: "If you please, sir, I want to leave of absence for a week

or two” (Brontë, 1847: 266). So, when she is given permission to go, she flees to Gateshead: “Promise me to stay only a week-” (Brontë, 1847: 267).

One of the most decisive episodes is when Rochester asks Jane to marry him. During all her life independence was her main goal, but now that she was in love she may have felt the need to fulfil moral standards and accept the proposal. Nonetheless, she is dubious, as achieving independence is her main objective in life. Marrying is a big step for Jane, mainly because she will no longer be Jane Eyre: “The idea that “Jane Eyre” is transformed into “Jane Rochester” becomes the focus” (Earnshaw, 2012: 178). If Jane was dependant on Rochester as his employee, the wedding will “annihilate” what was left of her identity. This happened to all girls that had to get married during the Victorian Era. Earnshaw refers to this: “The married name is substantial in effecting this identity switch, it “performs” the change in identity rather than simply recording it. This is not the case for the man. He is not “reborn” as somebody else when he marries” (2012: 180). Jane Eyre is not conscious that she will gain another identity until Rochester reminds her of that:

“It is Jane Eyre, sir.”
“Soon to be Jane Rochester”, he added: “in four weeks, Janet; not a day more. Do you hear that?”
(...)
“You blushed, and now you are white, Jane: what is that for?”
“Because you gave me a new name- Jane Rochester; and it seems so strange.”
“Yes, Mrs Rochester”, said he; “young Mrs Rochester- Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride.”
(Brontë, 1847: 309)

Her decision to marry Rochester could be interpreted as something contradictory in Jane’s personality: she pursues her autonomy but she ends up getting married. Not following the moral standards imposed by Victorian society was considered a failure, and Jane may have not wanted to be one. In the end, what is going to be a failure is her wedding. Once she discovers that Rochester is already married, her time in Thornfield abruptly comes to an end.

Jane finds shelter with the Rivers. St John is the patriarchal member of the family and he is a priest. He offers Jane a position as a teacher in a cottage. There, she lives alone and she is in charge of the education of some young girls: “It is a village school: your scholars will be poor girls- cottagers’ children – at the best, farmers’ daughters. Knitting, sewing, writing, ciphering, will be all you will have to teach” (Brontë, 1847: 429). During this period, Jane feels “free”: she lives alone in a small house provided by St John she works as a teacher and has a salary. This is what Jane might have always dreamt about. This atmosphere of bliss is broken when St John asks Jane to go with him to India. Jane seems to like his proposal until he tells her the one and only condition: “To do so, you must have a coadjutor: not a brother – that is a loose tie – but a husband” (Brontë, 1847: 490). Jane refuses, as marrying St John would mean losing her self-determination. According to Phillips, “St John’s commission in the novel is, in large part, to put Jane to the test. Having resisted the temptation of becoming Rochester’s mistress, Jane confronts St John duty itself as a temptation” (2008: 207).

Later on, the unexpected income of money Jane receives from an inheritance is what brings her total economic independence; she is more powerful than ever. This leads her to take the decision to share the money with St John and his sisters: “this newly acquired wealth translates into more than political and social access; for her, this fortune is a way to remove herself, Diana and Mary from the oppressive patriarchal labour system of Victorian England” (Owsley, 2013: 62). At this point, Jane is no longer plain, simple and poor. Because of this, she goes back to Thornfield after hearing Rochester’s voice in her head. At her arrival she discovers that Rochester has become blind. Since he no longer has the power of seeing, Jane will have the power now. The roles reverse and she no longer feels as his employee. It is Rochester who, from now on, will depend on Jane. Nevertheless, Jane marries him. She again succumbs to the standards of her society: “teasing her readers as Jane does Rochester, Brontë allows the novel to conclude within

the established tradition of the sentimental novel, and Jane joins the middle class, where gender divisions seem more stable” (Godfrey, 2005: 868).

In conclusion, Jane’s eternal fight to be independent ends up with her being practically totally self-sufficient. She knows she is part of the middle-class due to the inherited money but this does not make her feel superior. She instead manages the amount herself. We should not forget that it is only when she feels free that she goes back to Thornfield.

It is time to move to the next section of this paper. The following part will deal with how all the themes that I have analysed in this initial sections are portrayed in the different film adaptations of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

2. The Portrayal of Independence in Film Adaptations.

As an introduction to the next part of this paper, I would like to settle my purpose. Throughout the following sections, I aim to analyse how the topics treated in the first part of the research are portrayed into five different film adaptations of Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*. Some of the films belong to different decades of the twentieth century except from one, which was released in 2011.

2.1. *Jane Eyre*, directed by Robert Stevenson (1944).

In 1944 the first film adaptation from the 1847’s novel *Jane Eyre* was released on the big screen. In order to analyse the topics treated in the film it is necessary to provide some context. The screen adaptation was broadcasted in the US a year before the end of the II World War (1945). Since the United States was the last country to enter the conflict, and whose participation was crucial for the final development of the war, a sentiment of victory and gratefulness grew in the country. They were pioneers in the field of arm

supplies. Most of the men had to go to the war and gun factories remained open for women to take the position that men occupied in the industries. Women worked in factories in order to produce guns for the war. Their position changed from housewives to workers, from feminine women to “masculinized” figures.

As a consequence, male society needed women to become “feminine” again. This is why actress Joan Fontaine was the one chosen to bring Jane Eyre to life on the screen. Fontaine’s physical traits were opposed to the ones readers imagined Jane Eyre to have. This aspect is covered in Fanning’s study where she states that: “because women had displaced men in industries that had traditionally been male dominated, there was anxiety that women were “underfeminized” by war. It became imperative that, then, to remind women that their newfound freedoms were only temporary” (2018: 44). It was necessary to choose an actress with a visible feminine attitude and sweet physical traits in order to “feminize” the generation of women that had been working in “male” work positions. This aspect certainly had an effect on the film, since most of the parts in which Jane Eyre shows her anger and rebellion towards society were eliminated.

Concerning the comparison between the novel and the screen adaptation, I will go through the main episodes in Jane’s childhood, adolescence and adulthood that are related to her pursuit of independence. Firstly, what is worth commenting is the fact that the film starts with the arrival of Mr Brocklehurst at Gateshead. All the episodes of violence towards Jane are eliminated. According to Elizabeth Atkins “the director may have omitted the psychotically violent behaviour of John Reed to conform to the standards of the 1930 Production Code for films” (1993: 55-56). This code claimed that violent scenes could not be shown in films. The film starts putting Jane in a position of inferiority. She fights back to her aunt but, since we are not shown the aggressions received by her cousin, the audience may think that Jane is indeed a disobedient little girl. After this episode, Jane is taken to Lowood, a school for orphan girls whose headmaster is Mr Brocklehurst.

During her journal at the institution, we are shown how Jane meets Helen Burns, just as it happens in the novel. The main distinguished difference is that the character of Miss Temple is no longer the role model for Jane. In the film, the “good” person that Jane finds at Lowood, despite of her beloved friend Helen, is a doctor:

Significantly, the one person at Lowood who provides her with affection and companionship during her years as a student and then teacher is Miss Temple, the school’s mistress. As for the film, Jane is befriended and counselled instead by a man named Dr. Rivers. Such tempering with the characters is important since in the novel, Miss Temple provides Jane with a positive role model. (Higashi, 1996: 16)

Again, it is a masculine figure who will provide Jane with a morally correct education. Nevertheless, the influence of Dr Rivers on Jane is not the same as the one of Miss Temple in the book (Atkins, 1993). Going back again to the idea of the submission of the woman, Jane is dependent on Mr Brocklehurst (since he is the one who provides her with a roof and food) and the doctor, who takes care of Jane and Helen. Brontë’s initial purpose of introducing a female role model as Miss Temple is annihilated in this film adaptation.

Regarding Jane’s journey at Thornfield Hall, the part where she meets Rochester for the first time at the woods has also undergone some modifications. This scene is related in different ways: “the first time Jane meets Rochester, his horse falls on a patch of ice; yet in the movie, the horse falls because Jane steps into his path, which gives Jane the character of a dizzy damsel in distress” (Atkins, 1993: 58). This episode was intended to signal the start of their love story which, according to Higashi, has been misinterpreted by the filmmakers as they have ignored the original purpose of Brontë’s message (1996). At Thornfield, Jane’s attitude towards her master is what makes him fall in love with her: her strong sense of values that are being imposed by society (Higashi, 1996). Marriage is what probably strikes the most to the readers. In the screen adaptation marriage is treated as something you cannot escape from and a characteristic of female submission.

Nonetheless, “the film never penetrates the underlying significance of the tormented love of Jane and Rochester” (Riley, 1975: 153). Only the love scenes dominated by Rochester are taken into account, leaving Jane in a status of weakness.

Finally, the crucial stage of Jane’s pursue for independence is excluded. The filmmakers omit the journey with the Rivers and the death of her aunt from Madeira from whom she inherits a great amount of money. Instead, we are shown that after aunt Reed and her cousin John die she receives a letter from Rochester. The person who gives this letter to Jane is Dr Rivers from Lowood. In the letter Rochester asks Jane to go back with him. Her first reaction is to refuse his offer but, after hearing his voice, she decides to return to Thornfield.

In conclusion, the 1994 film eliminates all the hints that show Jane’s attitude of rebellion and independence. Fanning claims that “the adaptation frustratingly condemns Jane to a prison of a hyper-femininity where she (and female audiences) learns that her “proper place” is in the service of a man” (2018: 47). So, the film could be defined as an instructive adaptation where women have to learn from.

It is now time to turn our attention to the next film, which was released in 1970 and directed by Delbert Mann, so as to examine how this adaptation manages to portray a more encouraging understanding of the woman question and its potential.

2.2. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, directed by Delbert Mann (1970).

Delbert Mann directed the second screen adaptation of Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*. In this film, as well as the previous one, the context in which the film was released is also crucial for its understanding. As I mentioned before, the 1944 film was mostly influenced by the change of gender roles at the end of the II World War. “but, Mann’s version made in the period when the new wave of feminism was in its most exuberant, optimistic phase” (Ellis & Kaplan, 1999: 199). Thanks to the change that was taking place in society at the time, this film showed a more positive attitude regarding

women. If the 1944 adaptation is characterised, mainly, for being a gothic and patriarchal film, the 1970 version “tends to downplay the strong melodrama inherent in the novel, focusing instead upon the psychological realism and emotional power of Brontë’s character” (Riley, 1975: 146).

Mann’s adaptation starts with the omission of the episode at Gateshead. No violence against Jane is depicted. We are again presented an “idealized” conception of the Reeds. Since we are not aware of the violence our heroine suffered at Gateshead, we may not be fully conscious of Jane’s true motivations. The first scene shows Jane inside a carriage leaving Gateshead. She is being taken to Lowood, where the action of the film begins. In comparison to the Stevenson’s movie (1944), this one portrays the journey at the institution as an unkind and ruthless experience. The suffering, the starving and the abuse is shown to the audience. Lowood is no longer displayed as a profitable episode in Jane’s life. Nonetheless, the girls are no longer poorly dressed according to Ellis and Kaplan: “the inmates in Lowood wear uniforms and nightgowns that could have been designed for the pages of *Vogue*” (1999: 199). This episode can be considered faithful to the novel.

Afterwards, Jane Eyre flies to Thornfield Hall. She is now an adult, but according to Riley “there is no abrupt change in Jane’s character from child to adult; she is the same character, now older and more self-possessed. Although she is modest and still must wait for life’s larger experience” (1975: 149). It is in this period of her life where she will gain the experience Riley describes. As opposed to the novel, there is a change in manners and values in Jane’s early years and adulthood.

As for her first meeting with Mr Rochester, we must not forget how this is represented in this film adaptation. The portrayal of this scene is fairly accurate. The horse Rochester is riding slides on the ice and he falls. Jane is there to help him.

This episode stands to reason that, as is described in the novel, “when Rochester summons her, his manner is brusque and mocking, but Jane answers him with cool self-possession. (...) Soon enough it is evident that Rochester takes pleasure from these encounters” (Riley, 1975: 150). Jane’s modest but distant attitude is what strikes Rochester the most. In contrast to the 1944 film, Rochester is presented as a human character. He obviously has a sense of superiority towards Jane, but he is no longer an unpleasant company. The previous idea is covered in Ellis and Kaplan’s study where they claim that “George C. Scott’s Rochester is a humane, sympathetic character: instead of the charismatic, blustering Welles we have a tired, jaded, and aging man worn out by a life of too much easy pleasure, seeking in Jane the freshness of a young, innocent woman” (1999:199).

Following, Rochester and Jane attempt to get married. We, as readers, discover that the crazy servant that set fire to Rochester’s bed and bit Mason is, in fact, Rochester’s wife: Bertha Mason. In comparison to the previous film, Bertha is humanised. To exemplify this, I will directly quote the description that Jane gives of her in the novel. “The lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest” (Brontë, 1847: 353). Bertha Mason is presented as a monster in the book, as a woman with “virile force”. In other words, she is compared to a man due to her strength and physical traits. However, in the film, the actress that plays Bertha is opposed to the book description. This is precisely what makes her more human.

The episode with the Rivers is included in this adaptation. According to Riley, the heroine’s journey after leaving Thornfield “is a charge Jane must confront, a conflict she must reconcile before she can find ultimate happiness” (1975:151). This chapter can be considered faithful to the novel: St John and his sisters take care of Jane, and she is offered

a teaching position in a cottage. Nevertheless, Mann decided, as well as Stevenson, to omit the inheritance of money from Jane's uncle. She indeed wins moral independence throughout the final part of the film, but she never becomes economically autonomous.

The film ends with the reunion of Jane and Rochester at Ferndean. And, as Ellis and Kaplan state:

In humanizing Rochester, Mann comes closer to portraying an equal relationship, but the camera still favours Rochester and shows Jane looking up to or being looked down upon a male observer. Structurally Rochester is still in command, and it is significant that the equality comes not from Jane's rebellion or his questioning intelligence, but simply from the fact that Rochester's weaknesses are on the surface right from the beginning. (1999: 201)

Hence, Jane and Rochester's apparently equalised relationship in this film proves to be a mere illusion; male superiority still prevails. Jane must subdue herself and 'accept' a secondary position in which Mr Rochester dominates.

To conclude, it is important to highlight that even in the cinematographic industry, Jane cannot fully obtain the independence and the importance she deserves. Despite the context of the time, dominated by a new feminism, men even succeed at representing Jane as an inferior. After twenty-six years (from the 1944 film to the 1970) there is still a dominant patriarchy.

I will now continue with the analysis of the *Jane Eyre* film adaptations. The next one will be the one directed by the Italian director Franco Zeffirelli in 1996, which depicts some crucial episodes from the novel that had been omitted in previous cinematic adaptations.

2.3 Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1996).

Franco Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre* is the first film from all the five screen adaptations chosen to do this analysis that starts at Gateshead. Jane is presented to us in the Red Room where she is taken as a punishment after beating her cousin John. As Alleva states: "to

picture a female child behaving like this (imagine Dickens' Little Neil reacting so fiercely) must have been the first of many shocks for the novel's early readers, but the movie substitutes easygoing pathos for that shock" (1996:18). The first scene is already shocking: the abrupt movements of the camera suggest Jane's feelings after being locked inside the room. Mistreatment is present but it is not directly portrayed.

From Gateshead the action moves to Lowood. Jane is taken there after a humiliation: she is told that she is evil. A second humiliation takes place at her arrival to Lowood: she is placed on a stool for a whole day. Additionally, this adaptation focuses on her years at Lowood. Miss Temple and Helen Burns are crucial figures for Jane's development in the book, and so they are in the film. Scenes of how girls learn at Lowood are presented for the first time. Moreover, suffering not only takes place in Gateshead but also at Lowood:

But it is Jane's suffering, and that of her fellow students, that the films emphasize. Although the Gateshead sequences as well routinely emphasize the sufferings of little Jane, who is variously struck down, locked into rooms, shoved, and called names, the lengthier Lowood sequences give a still stronger impression of generalized childhood anguish. (Dole, 2007: 244)

Thanks to Miss Temple's influence, Jane decides to take an important step: finding a job and leaving Lowood after ten years. As far as the first meeting between Jane and Rochester is concerned, some modifications were made in the film. Critic Paisley Mann mentions this aspect: "accordingly, Zeffirelli's version alters the scene in which Rochester (William Hurt) and Jane (Charlotte Gainsbourg) meet. Zeffirelli strips away the Gothic elements of the text; instead, Jane wanders through a lush autumn landscape while birds chirp and soft music plays" (2011: 155).

In comparison to the book, this scene is described by Jane Eyre as a cold, dark and lonely evening. The main difference is that Zeffirelli's Rochester is portrayed as a kind and polite gentleman. In the novel, Jane depicts Rochester as a rude and distant master:

“I think so: he is very changeful and abrupt” (Brontë, 1847: 150). Eventually, we discover in the book that his attitude will be, to a certain extent, the cause of Jane’s romantic feelings. Mann analyses this aspect: “while Zeffirelli highlights the romantic appeal of Rochester’s arrival, he forgets that the novel suggests that this appeal is due to his gruffness (2011: 155).

Moving forward, Rochester and Jane get married. In contrast to the 1944 film and as a similarity with the 1970 film, Bertha is portrayed. She is presented in an indirect way through her peculiar and haunting laugh. “Bertha’s laugh tells viewers there is more to Rochester than the seemingly innocent portrait reveals” (Parkinson, 2015: 22). As a consequence of representing Rochester’s character as someone kind and pleasant, Bertha will also suffer a “humanization”. She is presented, more or less, as Mann does in his film. Mann claims that:

Because this film’s Rochester is not temperamental or violent, Zeffirelli does not need to portray Bertha in a negative way so that viewers recognize Rochester’s patience and sacrifice [...] She remains still for most of the scene and the audience begins to wonder why she needs to be locked away. (2011: 159)

This highly contrasts with the expression “clothed hyena” (Brontë, 1847: 352) that Jane uses to refer to Bertha Mason in the book. Immediately after this shocking discovery of Rochester’s hidden wife, Jane leaves Thornfield. In the novel Jane leaves without anything. However, in the film she does leave Thornfield Hall, but in a carriage and all her personal belongings. The long journey Jane spends alone walking, starving and freezing is omitted. She leaves comfortably and in this screen adaptation she seems to know where she is going. Jane arrives weak at the Rivers’ house but Mary is waiting for her at the door.

This is new in all the film adaptations commented so far. Either this episode is eliminated or it is faithful to the book. The Rivers take care of Jane but she is not offered

the teaching position this time. Nonetheless, Jane does receive the inheritance from her uncle. This gives her economic independence, as in the book.

Finally, the last scenes remain precise to the novel. However, “there is no mention during the reunion of Jane’s newfound wealth and consequent social power (although Zeffirelli’s film does grant her this money, unlike many other adaptations). Instead, Jane quickly comes to kneel at Rochester’s feet” (Parkinson, 2015: 30). The audience cannot see their faces but the happy ending is predictable.

In conclusion, despite of some modifications both in the characters and in the scenes, we could say that it is faithful to the Brontë’s novel most of the time. We need bear in mind that the contemporary public at the cinema is completely different to the readers of the novel in the nineteenth century. The context, the values and the moral standards of that society are certainly diverse from the ones assimilated when the book was published.

I will now move to the next section where I will deal with the 1997 film, directed by Young. This next film was broadcasted just one year after Zeffirelli’s film. The socio-historic context can be considered the same. We will see how aspects of womanhood and the role of Jane Eyre are represented in Young’s adaptation.

2.4 Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, directed by Robert Young (1997).

In 1997 Robert Young directed *Jane Eyre*, only a year after the last full-length film that had been released. According to Kaplan and Ellis “thus, by 1997 in the wake of the feminist cultural intervention, it was possible for BBC and A & E to construct a *Jane Eyre* version less about patriarchal domination” (1999: 204). This new context of feminist movements will have a direct effect on this film. An effort is made to listen to Jane for the first time. Nonetheless, we need to bear in mind that we are commenting on a film, and films always tend to adapt the novel to a contemporary public within a specific

cultural framework. In other words, even though this film does not over dramatize the main character and the main action, it does adapt it to the audience of 1997.

Robert Young's film starts by showing how Jane is taken to the Red Room in Gateshead. Here we can notice the first difference in comparison to Brontë's original text, where Jane explains that she is taken to the room due to fighting back to his cousin after he beats her. However, the struggles of Jane in the room where her uncle had died are shown since Jane hallucinates and imagines the body of her uncle lying on the bed. From the scenes at Gateshead we are transported to Lowood. There, suffering, humiliations, punishments and starving are the main difficulties Jane has to face. Helen Burns also appears as the only company Jane has at the institution. Additionally, Miss Temple is also depicted but not in the way as we, readers, imagine her in the book. She is indeed the kindest of all teachers at Lowood, but she is not the role model Jane considers her to be in the novel. When Jane decides to look for a teaching position out of Lowood her justification is: "I was desperate for change" (11:19). Her journey at the school has to come to an end and it is time for our heroine to start seeking for independence.

Jane Eyre arrives at Thornfield Hall. In this film adaptation, her master, Mr Rochester is not represented as the unpleasant and sometimes rude master. Director Robert Young chooses to portray Rochester as a more kind and loving man:

Ciaran Hinds' Rochester is more passionate and emotional than Brontë's hero, but he makes Jane's interest in him more believable. [...] Hind's Rochester is a complicated but ultimately moral man, who becomes genuinely intrigued by, and then in love with, the quiet, genuinely unpretentious and Christian governess. This Rochester is far from the cold, distanced, even cruel Rochester of earlier versions and even of Brontë's novel. (Kaplan and Ellis, 1999: 203)

Thus, we could assume that by representing him as a likeable man Jane's voice is forgotten whereas Rochester's behaviour is softened. Nevertheless, when they first meet Rochester's abrupt attitude against Jane is apparent. The atmosphere is similar to the one described in the book: there is wind, darkness and fog, unlike the 1996 film where the

Gothic elements are omitted: “using slow motion and cuts between the horse’s thundering hooves and close-ups of Jane’s terrified expression, Young emphasized the erotic charge as well as the terror of this scene” (Mann, 2011: 156). After their “first” meeting in Thornfield, Rochester’s conduct will become more correct. Jane’s submission during her journey as a governess in Thornfield is portrayed pretty much as it is in the book. She dresses up charmingly to spend time with Rochester. This aspect was previously mentioned in the first part of the paper, where critic Talairach-Vielmas insists on the importance of beauty canons in the nineteenth century.

Concerning the chapter of the wedding, in the 1997 adaptation the director (just as Zeffirelli did a year before) chooses to depict Bertha, Rochester’s wife. This scene is given much importance, since the revelation of Rochester’s marriage is what makes Jane decide to leave Thornfield. Again, Jane makes this decision on her own. The journey until the house of the Rivers is loyal to the book: Jane leaves alone, she is weak and she has nothing to eat. In the book, Jane describes it as a moment of complete solitude: “not a tie holds me to human society at this moment” (Brontë, 1847: 388).

Unlike the 1944 film and similarly to the 1970 and 1996 films, the 1997 version also portrays Jane’s episode with the Rivers. St John offers a teaching position to Jane, in which she finds some independence again. The 1996 omits this offering, but Young is loyal to the book.

We must not forget that in the novel Jane is the heir of a great fortune. Young’s movie does not depict this moment where Jane becomes economically independent. The idea of freedom for Jane seems to be irrelevant to the director. The last scenes of the film show how Jane, just as the book detailed, hears the voice of Rochester calling her. She immediately has the need to flee to Thornfield to meet him again. She then discovers that Rochester is blind due to a fire. Here, Jane takes the “power” of the relationship, since she is the one who has to guide Rochester in his daily life.

In conclusion, the 1997 film gives a more important role to Jane. However, patriarchy and submission are still very present. The representation and understanding of the episode with the Rivers is crucial to understand Jane's character and her motivations. In addition, despite of constant modifications of the original plot, aspects of womanhood have changed from the first film adaptation in 1944. More importance is now given to the role of women, and specially to Jane Eyre.

It is now time to move into the next and final analysis of the screen adaptations. In the last section I will examine the last of Jane Eyre's adaptation to the cinema as far as we know: Fukunaga's film of 2011.

2.5 *Jane Eyre*, directed by Cary Fukunaga (2011).

Fukunaga's 2011 film *Jane Eyre* is the last screen adaptation of Brontë's novel so far. It is the first *Jane Eyre* film from the 21st century. In this case, the context can be considered different from all the films we have analysed until now, mostly marked by an economic crisis, especially in Europe and a new rising wave of feminism.

As far as the analysis of the film is concerned, for the first time, the film starts with an adult Jane. One of the most striking features of the 2011 film is the constant use of flashbacks that are used to tell Jane's story. In the first scene of the film Jane appears alone, weak and wet due to the rain. Jane is leaving Thornfield but in that moment we are not aware of the reasons of her escape. Brontë's novel also starts with the heroine's struggles at Gateshead while, in this case, the director chose to start with her complicated journey. St John Rivers and his sisters find Jane at the door and decide to take care of her.

In this moment, adult Jane is transformed into young Jane. She's at Gateshead and her cousin John is chasing her. From her suffering during her adulthood we move into the agony of little Jane Eyre. In comparison to the other films, it is the first time that the protagonist's misery is well-represented: she is no longer a feminine Jane that has to fit within the moral standards of her time, she is now the strong Jane that wants to fight for

her independence: “Her story begins, quite naturally, at *Gateshead*, a starting point where she encounters the uncomfortable givens of her career: a family which is not her real family” (Gilbert, 1979: 342). She is not considered a member of the family and this anger will make of her the person she will become and this will be one of the main reasons for her rebellious behaviour. The moment when Jane is beaten by her cousin is also depicted, and from this we are moved into the red room where Jane is taken as a punishment after fighting back. Jane’s experience in Fukunaga’s red room differs from how it is described in the novel. In the film Jane does not seem scared until smoke comes out of the fireplace. In that moment young Jane faints but the real agony described in the novel is not present: “What a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! How all my brain was I tumult, and all my heart in insurrection” (Brontë, 1847: 11).

After this episode, Jane is taken to Lowood so that her evilness fades through harsh education. Another flashback takes place here: we are moved to the River’s home where Jane “fakes” her identity. It is the first time this moment is actually portrayed in a screen adaptation. Understanding Jane’s character seems to be more important, so it is relevant to show the episodes of her life that will lead to her moral freedom.

Jane’s years at Lowood are described in the films as years of learning how to be a lady. The moral lesson to extract is always the same one: if the girls’ attitude is not the proper one, they will receive punishments. However, “Lowood offers Jane a valley of refuge from “the ridge of lighted heath”, a chance to learn to govern her anger while learning how to become a governess in the company of a few women she admires” (Gilbert: 1979: 344). Helen Burns and Miss Temple are the role models Gilbert is referring to. The film moves back to Jane’s journey with the Rivers. St John’s sisters have to leave in order to continue their work as governesses. Meanwhile, Jane accepts the teaching position in the cottage after John’s offering.

Rochester's love story at Thornfield is indeed depicted but we could argue to what extent it is given the importance that the novel gives to it. In the film, Jane arrives at Thornfield after having decided to leave Lowood. Again, what is highlighted is the fact that this is Jane's own decision. This episode can be considered as the one represented in the most faithful way so far. Jane is not feminised in the way Stevenson's film does, or it does not soften the character of Mr Rochester as in the 1970 film. Fukunaga represents Jane as the plain but determined character that Brontë created.

Reaching the final scenes of the adaptation, St John announces the death of the uncle from Madeira and Jane immediately becomes the owner of the inheritance. The episode does not differ from the book, where Jane clearly states that her wish is to share the money with the Rivers: "What I want is, that you should write to your sisters and tell them of the fortune that has accrued to them" (Brontë, 1847: 467). Then, the disagreement between Jane and St John after asking Jane to marry him is also depicted in the same way as in the book.

Finally, another similarity is that Jane goes back to Thornfield after hearing Rochester's voice calling her. Jane meets her master once again. However, the chosen location for the meeting in the movie is outside, at the garden, while in the book it this happens at the parlour. The scene is romantic and melodramatic, it seems as if it was one of the many Hollywood romantic films. Nonetheless, in the book the episode suggests distance, respect and a clear empowerment of the character of Jane: "I am my own mistress" (Brontë, 1847: 527).

In conclusion, Fukunaga's film depicts Jane in a more loyal way than the other films. She is given the importance she deserves and the film mostly focuses on her development into an independent lady. There are obviously hints of Hollywood romance prototypical scenarios, but as I have said in previous sections, it is important bear in mind that a film cannot represent all the aspects that the reader would like to see on the screen.

After having dealt with the analysis of five Jane Eyre film adaptations, my purpose, now, is to establish some conclusions and to provide some relevant topics as further research.

3. Conclusions and Further Research.

A close analysis of the primary text and its critical studies has allowed me to state some conclusions. I will first analyse the conclusions I have obtained through my study of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and, then, I will deal with the resolutions that the interpretation of the films have provided me.

First of all, a possible description for the character of Jane Eyre could be the one of a young lady who, in spite of the pressure derived from strong nineteenth-century values, wants to surpass the strict moral standards that her society has established. This will lead her to the pursue of her own independence. Jane does not only want to obtain economic independence the possibility to be her own mistress, but she also wants to feel free within society. Once she is finally economically independent from Rochester, due to the inheritance, this is not as liberating as she had envisioned, since she still feels pressured by societal values. The final decision that she makes on her own is to marry Mr Rochester. Whether she chose that for love or due to the importance of marriage in the Victorian Era, we do not know. What we can imagine is that after having been regarded as an inferior citizen, punished, mistreated and subordinated to male characters during all her life, she manages to find a path of self-love and peace. However, as we have just mentioned, she eventually capitulates back to the traditional rules established by Victorian society: she is once again subordinated to a man. In other words, Jane tries hard to find her way in society, and indeed she does. Her final relationship with Rochester is far more equalised than the one they had when she was working for him. At that point, she does not economically depend on him. In addition, due to Rochester's blindness, she

is the one who guides him. Even though we cannot talk about a gender role inversion, she is undeniably more powerful than before.

Second, the portrayal of Jane Eyre in the film adaptations is not the same as the one we obtain from reading the novel. Since all of the films have been directed by men, there is a clear sense of patriarchy. Scenes seem to give more importance to the character of Rochester to the extent that it could even seem that they are forgetting that the film is about Jane Eyre. Furthermore, the episode of the Rivers is omitted in most of them. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that this episode could be considered as the “climax” of Jane’s pursue of independence. Screen adaptations create the impression that Jane is a weak character who cannot help going back to Rochester. Last but not least, some episodes which are considered crucial for my research such as the very start of the novel, the meetings of Jane and Rochester at Thornfield or the marriage proposal all suffer from modifications or they are sometimes eliminated. Jane’s personality carves out from all her traumatic experiences as a child. This is what makes her Jane Eyre.

To conclude, Jane’s depiction differs from one film to another, but it is never as faithful as readers who then watch the film had imagined while reading the novel. However, screen adaptations must shorten the length of books due to the limited duration of the films. In the case of *Jane Eyre* the omission of some episodes could be understandable. Nonetheless, we cannot forget that *Jane Eyre* has been considered a feminist novel that depicts a girl who fights against the rules of her society, and this is precisely what adaptations should portray.

In this paper I have introduced some issues that I could not fully develop due to the limitations within the extension of my research. These aspects can be further analysed in future work in order to provide a deeper knowledge on both Brontë’s novel and the screen adaptations.

Firstly, further research is needed to analyse the marriage between masters and governesses in the nineteenth century. This will contribute to understand Brontë's story from another point of view. The causes and consequences of this sort of marriages will bring about new topics of discussion. Additionally, this can be linked to another engaging research area: how the genre of conduct literature affects Jane's character.

Secondly, another interesting aspect to consider is the research on the 1970, 1997 and 2011 films. There are few studies concerning these three films. In order to continue with the analysis on how aspects on womanhood are depicted in the films and how they evolve from one decade to another, research on the three aforementioned films is needed to confirm their importance and to provide a better understanding of how femininity is portrayed both in the novel and in the films.

Lastly, further studies should pay close attention to how education in *Jane Eyre* is crucial for her ethical development. Jane's years at Lowood will have an effect on the heroine for the rest of her life. Furthermore, a deeper analysis on how education is depicted in the films could be considered as a significant aspect to add to following screen adaptation interpretations.

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