

T HE EVOLUTION OF *JANE EYRE* IN FILM ADAPTATION: FROM CLASSIC FEMALE STEREOTYPE TO INDEPENDENT WOMAN

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Abstract: *Jane Eyre* is one of the English novels that has been most adapted for the big screen. The recreation of the Victorian atmosphere by Charlotte Brontë, the female author of the novel, as well as the universe of its main character, an orphaned girl who manages to survive as a governess in a hostile environment, have been especially interesting for the film world. Furthermore, Jane Eyre's markedly feminist character has converted her into a pioneering character in this medium, in addition to determining her timelessness. With the aim of gaining further insights into the representation of Jane Eyre in the film adaptations directed by Robert Stevenson (1944), Franco Zeffirelli (1996) and Cary Fukunaga (2011), this paper makes an analysis on the character as a person and as a role model, according to the theories of Francesco Casetti and Federico Di Chio (2007). On the basis of these considerations, the intention is to highlight how the character and her feminist tenor have evolved from classic cinema up until the present day.

Key words: *Jane Eyre* / Charlotte Brontë / film adaptation / feminism.

LA EVOLUCIÓN DE *JANE EYRE* EN LAS ADAPTACIONES CINEMATOGRÁFICAS: DEL ESTEREOTIPO FEMENINO CLÁSICO A LA MUJER INDEPENDIENTE

Resumen: *Jane Eyre* es una de las novelas inglesas que han sido más adaptadas a la gran pantalla. La recreación de la atmósfera victoriana por Charlotte Brontë, la autora de la novela, además del universo de su protagonista, una chica huérfana que logra sobrevivir como institutriz en un ambiente hostil, ha sido especialmente interesante para el mundo del cine. Además, el carácter marcadamente feminista de Jane Eyre la ha convertido en un personaje pionero en este medio, además de determinar su atemporalidad. Con el propósito de profundizar en la representación de Jane Eyre en las adaptaciones fílmicas dirigidas por Robert Stevenson (1944), Franco Zeffirelli (1996) y Cary Fukunaga (2011), este estudio realiza un análisis del personaje como persona y como rol basado en las teorías de Francesco Casetti y Federico Di Chio (2007). Desde estas consideraciones, este trabajo pretende evidenciar cómo el personaje y su tono feminista han evolucionado desde el cine clásico hasta la actualidad.

Palabras clave: *Jane Eyre* / Charlotte Brontë / adaptación cinematográfica / feminism.

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Introduction

The novel *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, possesses a series of features, particularly as regards its main character, which have captivated the interest of the film industry ever since the silent film age.¹ On the one hand, despite taking place in the nineteenth century, the story is timeless, in the way that it is understood at any time, because it has elements of suspense and romance attractive to different generations of readers and spectators. On the other hand, Jane's character implies a femininity model ahead of her time, which is still interesting in the current audiovisual landscape, since it offers multiple readings and interpretations thanks to its complexity and its contradictions.

This has led to the making of different films, primarily American ones, during the lengthy period from the first decades of the twentieth century to 2011. Likewise, it has been adapted for the theatre and television on many occasions, thus contributing a new dimension to the story and making it accessible to the audiences of both media, plus more contemporary ones, for which reason it has attained an almost timeless validity. Different studies have analysed the multiple adaptations of the novel, especially the film kind. Some have focused on specific aspects of the work, such as the representation of "the mad woman" in contrast to Jane,² others on the parallels drawn between Jane and Cinderella in some adaptations,³ and yet others on the literary work's feminist potential and its respective film adaptations,⁴ i.e. the object of study at hand. Instead of focusing on these approaches, this article analyses the differences existing between three different cinematographic adaptations in order to check if the real context, the conditions of the production and the sensibility of their directors modify, to some extent, the approximation to the character of Jane.

In this respect, it should be noted that *Jane Eyre*'s character may be linked to other nineteenth-century romantic heroines. As one of these heroines we found Emma Bovary (*Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert, 1857). Regarding the above, Tabrizi and Khosravi point out that "Jane seems to be a historical counterpart for the French Madame Bo-

vary –as both women seem to share a highly romanticized view of the world, unconsciously craving prosperity, passion, and high society".⁵ Jane and Emma are heroines who reflect a turbulent social context and comply with the archetype of free-spirited women who rebel against the impositions of the world. Thus, the clash between their inner universe and the strict morals of the society to which they belonged evinced the desire for women's emancipation at the time. In that way that desire –and need– for freedom reveals an important topic of the time: "the irresolvable feminine problem of exclusion".⁶ In the specific case of Jane and Emma, both have routines that disagree with their vital expectations, being conscious of their own social limitations, although they face them in a completely different way.

The story's universality, its presence in different media and Jane's maverick, feminist and unconventional character, highlights the relevance of this study. The general objective is to gain a deeper understanding of her representation and evolution in the different film adaptations of the novel. The second objective is to determine if the character has gone beyond her context or, on the contrary, her representation is similar or contradictory. To this end, the study sample included three film adaptations made in the United States, all titled *Jane Eyre*, directed by Robert Stevenson (1944), Franco Zeffirelli (1996) and Cary Fukunaga (2011). Each of them belongs to a different production juncture: the first belongs to classic Hollywood cinema, the second was directed by a filmmaker/*auteur* and the third is a more recent coproduction with the United Kingdom. Thus, two periods and styles are addressed: the classic and the postmodern. These differences between the audiovisual contexts invite us to carry out a comparative analysis on the three film adaptations, and also to compare how they allow us to observe how the passage of the time affects the character of Jane.

To this effect, we have employed a qualitative-descriptive methodology, based on the contributions of experts as regards the novel, the character and their adaptations. With respect to the analysis of *Jane Eyre* in each one of the three films, we have applied a character worksheet created by the Aná-

¹ BONET SOLVES, Victoria; PIQUERAS GÓMEZ, María Jesús; FERRER ANDRÉS, BERTA, 2017, p. 468.

² MANN, Paisley, 2013; GONZÁLEZ, Tecla, 2018, p. 150.

³ RAMOS FREND, Eva María, 2007, p. 420-424.

⁴ ELLIS, Kate; KAPLAN, Ann, 1981, p. 83-94.

⁵ TABRIZI, Sanaz Alizadeh; KHOSRAVI, Robab, 2015, p. 1945.

⁶ TABRIZI, Sanaz Alizadeh; KHOSRAVI, Robab, 2015, p. 1947.

lisis de Medios, Imágenes y Relatos Audiovisuales (AdMIRA) research team of the University of Seville, based on the theories of Casetti and Di Chio (2007). This qualitative tool is heir to the contributions of narratologists such as Seymour Chatman, Algirdas Julius Greimas and Vladimir Propp, all central to audio-visual narrative research. To gain a full picture of the traits making up the character's dimensionality, it is essential to study her from three basic perspectives: 1) her iconographic dimension and sexuality; 2) her psychological and sociological dimensions; 3) and her role, stereotype and relationships with the rest of the characters. Through these items it is possible to know the age, appearance, speech, sexual orientation, behavior, thought, feelings, social and cultural level or motivations and actions of the characters, as indicated in the next analysis tool. In addition, each item allows to know how Jane Eyre evolves in each of the three film adaptations. These elements, employed as indicators in the analysis, confirm that "all characters are defined by their way of being (identity, physical features, character, etc.) and their actions, i.e. their behaviour and the relationships that they establish with other people, which involves a series of attributes that individualise them".⁷ In other words, the intention is to construct audio-visual characters as beings that possess the same concerns, problems and aspirations as the target audience in order to facilitate the process of identification.

Jane Eyre, feminist icon and character

Since her creation, *Jane Eyre* has been the focus of many studies. According to Martínez Astorga (18), the novel is a Bildungsroman, that is, belonging to the coming-of-age genre describing the psychological and moral development of an individual, in this case a woman, and the liberation of a restless mind that sees how dreams can come true.

Despite its success, a number of researchers claim that, at the time, the critics considered *Jane Eyre* to be a morally dangerous book.⁸ For although it did not consciously violate the Victorian moral code of chastity, it did indeed encourage a reinterpretation of gender roles and presented Jane Eyre herself as a passionate human being with physical desires. Specifically, in the oeuvre of the three sisters provocations against the rigid gender roles in

Graphic 1. Tool for analysis of characters as a person and as a role

	Jane Eyre (1944)	Jane Eyre (1996)	Jane Eyre (2011)
Iconography			
Age			
Appearance			
Costume			
Speech			
Transformation			
Psychology			
Personality			
Relationships			
Thoughts			
Feelings			
Evolution			
Sociology			
Social Level			
Economic Level			
Cultural Level			
Sexuality			
Gender			
Sexual Orientation			
Role			
Type of role			
Motivations			
Actions			

Source: AdMIRA Group Research (University of Seville) based on Casetti and Di Chio (2007)

society can be perceived. Thus, it's possible to interpret the "Brontës' novels as critiques of the strict Victorian divisions between masculinity and femininity; they have pointed to themes of cross-dressing, androgyny, and cross-gendered behavior in the texts of all three Brontë sister".⁹ As to *Jane Eyre* and with respect to this assessment, Godfrey states that "while the text appears ultimately to confirm a male-dominated Victorian gender system, it has so radically subverted such gender constructions",¹⁰ whereby it is often vindicated as a pioneering literary work of feminism.

⁷ SÁNCHEZ NORIEGA, José Luis, 2000, p. 126.

⁸ GARCÍA-DONCEL, María R., 1988; GILBERT, Sandra; GUBAR, Susan, 1985; MONTERO, Rosa, 2018; WINNIFRITH, Tom, 1977.

⁹ WARHOL, Robyn R., 1996, p. 861.

¹⁰ GODFREY, Esther, 2005, p. 869.

Although it is true that Jane Eyre as the character has been addressed from different perspectives, it can be said that, from that of gender equality, all of them see her through the same prism: that of her evolution as a woman who is struggling to break stereotypes in pursuit of her full freedom. In this sense, even in the context of a narrative of feminist individualism in the imperialist age¹¹ and of being closeted in a patriarchal environment, the essence and identity of the main character, as well as her way of acting, signal a clear break with androcentric dictates. According to Kirilloff et al., "this is a character whose acts push the boundaries of what was considered woman [sic] appropriate behaviour in the nineteenth century",¹² thus becoming an icon who has survived the passage of time.

Returning to the moment when the character was created back in 1847, what is relevant about Jane Eyre is her non-conformist spirit inasmuch as she attempts to rebel against a system monopolised and led by men. Her self-determination in a patriarchal world has led some to claim that it is a proto-feminist work.¹³ Jane Eyre was conceived as a heroine. Charlotte Brontë's intention, when she wrote the novel, was to describe the social advancement of young women. At this sense, Gilbert and Gubar exposure that: "Jane always displays a passionate desire to rebel against the customs".¹⁴

Drawing from Gothic literature, the character is enveloped in a claustrophobic and repressive atmosphere, which can be understood as a metaphor of the situation of many women imprisoned in a private sphere dominated by men. In light of this, her love of reading is interpreted as an instrument that empowers her and provides her with the necessary education to confront the real world. This leads her on a quest for fulfilment in both of her lives, the real and the imaginary, which seem to enrich her individuality and define her personality, while in turn allowing her to discover that there is a much broader realm of experiences out there for those willing to overcome their fears. Jane Eyre is a

character who wavers between compliance with the rules and the desire to infringe them.¹⁵ Martínez Astorga suggests that the main character does not grow up as the result of a single occurrence but evolves gradually. Jane's life experiences enable her to assess her condition and decisions and encourage her to embark on the quest for her identity and self-affirmation, as well as her desire for freedom.¹⁶ Accordingly, Martín declares that Jane Eyre is the reflection of the author's personality, a woman who expresses her expectations, who strives to fulfil them and who is capable of challenging the mores and customs of her society.¹⁷ Consequently, many women saw in the main character the representation of an unfeminine woman. Notwithstanding, it is obvious that the female author created a heroine in order to vindicate gender equality. For Jane, life per se is heroic and implies taking action against a world that stifles the identity of individuals and inhibits their imagination. Among other factors, representing a feminine will to resist the demands of men made the novel stand out.¹⁸

For her part, and from a critical perspective, Montes Doncel estates that the famous passage in which Jane Eyre has achieved her long-awaited professional and financial stability, is an excellent example of this character's struggle for gender equality.¹⁹

Against the treatment of Jane Eyre from a non-conformist perspective, in the sense of a female character created in the nineteenth century who broke with the prevailing female model, it should be noted that, beyond its repercussions, it is grounded in the iconic character of Cinderella.²⁰ Indeed, Jane Eyre, albeit acquiring a new role, was based on a classic stereotype in which the main character overcomes the obstacles in her path with sheer willpower and intellect.

Anglo-Saxon film adaptations of the novel

Jane Eyre is Charlotte Brontë's most adapted novel. First and foremost, the work was a milestone in

¹¹ SPIVAK, Gayatri, 1985.

¹² KIRILLOFF, Gabi; CAPUANO, Peter J.; FREDERICK, Julius; JOCKERS, Matthew L., 2018, p. 821.

¹³ MORTON, Stephen, 2010, p. 123.

¹⁴ GILBERT, Sandra; GUBAR, Susan, 1980, p. 337.

¹⁵ HERNÁNDEZ LORENZO, Laura, 2015, p. 828.

¹⁶ MARTÍNEZ ASTORGA, Consuelo, 2016, p. 75-77.

¹⁷ MARTÍN, Salustiano, 1997, p. 92.

¹⁸ MAYNARD, John, 2018, p. 194.

¹⁹ MONTES DONCEL, Rosa Eugenia, 2005, p. 96.

²⁰ RAMOS FRENDÓ, Eva María, 2007, p. 420-424.

English literature²¹ thanks, among other aspects, to its main character, as authentic as she is courageous and rebellious.²² Likewise, the novel was, and still is, closely related to cinema, due to the interest it meant to the film industry to capture a literary work so well known for the public, and represent through the star system a character like Jane, marked by breaking social schemes. Moreover, the literature and the theater constituted the two main narrative sources of the cinema and the producers looked for literary successes to succeed in the film.²³ This was especially the case with Hollywood, where the most popular works of the most outstanding European writers were already adapted for the big screen even in the silent film age.

Before the appearance of sound cinema, a total of eight films adaptations of the novel released –some now lost or difficult to trace– which means the interest that the world of cinema had in the play. Among them, two produced in the United States highlighted, namely, *Woman and Wife* (Edward José, 1918) and *Jane Eyre* (Hugo Ballin, 1921), with the actresses Alice Brady and Mabel Ballin playing Jane, respectively. With the appearance of sound films, Hollywood made a new film version of the novel, directed by Christy Cabanne and starring Virginia Bruce and Colin Clive as Jane and Rochester, which was premiered in 1934. Although it belongs to classic Hollywood cinema (1927-1972), and “we can define the classic narration such as a specific configuration of standardized options to represent history and to manipulate the possibilities of the plot and the style”,²⁴ this first sound film adaptation was not considered an important production, this is because it did not count with actors that occupied a hegemonic place in the star system of the 30s.

The first relevant film adaptation of *Jane Eyre* was directed by Robert Stevenson in 1944, its main characters were Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine –two actors that had the category of Hollywood stars–, and the prestigious philosopher Aldous Huxley participated in the movie script, and also, they counted with a psychological character black and white picture taken by Georges Barnes. It is also the adaptation that best dovetails with the approaches

of classic melodrama,²⁵ due to the treatment of aspects such as the vexation that the main character suffers from her family when she is a girl, the deep loneliness that she suffers in the boarding school, or the importance that the adaptation gives to the love story between her and Rochester, specially at the end. But it was not until 1996, when the narrative keys of classic cinema were now water under the bridge in the postmodern cinema age –especially, with the fragmentation of the narratives structures or the search for a higher realism through the light, the aesthetic or the fidelity to the original novel–, that the next American adaptation was released –following several films produced in India, Egypt and Mexico– which was directed by Franco Zeffirelli. The intention of this coproduction with France, Italy and the United Kingdom was to tell the story in a less novelised fashion way and to focus more on Jane, especially through her point of view and her vital evolution. The last American adaptation of the novel to date has been the coproduction with the United Kingdom that Cary Fukunaga directed in 2011, which is noteworthy for showing “the life of Jane by playing with the past and present of the main character”.²⁶

The novel of Charlotte Brontë has also awakened the interest of the television media. In 1949 the first version was released for the program *Studio One* which highlighted for having Chalton Heston as Rochester, and in 1970, a relevant British telefilm was released directed by Delbert Mann, and with Susannah York and Georges C. Scott in the roles of Jane and Rochester. Afterwards, two miniseries appeared for the BBC: the one realized in 1973 by Joan Draft, with Sorcha Cusack and Michael Jayton as the main characters, and the one directed by Julian Amyes in 1983 with Zelah Clarke and Timothy Dalton as Jane and Rochester. Between the adaptation of Zeffirelli and the one of Fukunaga, two more British miniseries were released, one realized in 1997 by Robert Young, in which the main characters were played by Samantha Morton and Ciaran Hinds, and the last one, from 2006, which had Ruth Wilson and Toby Stephens as the main couple, and it is the only one directed by a woman: Susanna White.²⁷

²¹ ALONSO ALONSO, María, 2018, p. 278.

²² ALBURQUERQUE PONTE, Charles; SOARES DA SILVEIRA, Vanalucia, 2015, p. 158.

²³ BALDOTANO ROMÁN, Gabriel, 2007, p. 17.

²⁴ BORDWELL, David, 2009, p. 156.

²⁵ PÉREZ RUBIO, Pablo, 2018, p. 10-11.

²⁶ BONET SOLVES, Victoria; PIQUERAS GÓMEZ, María Jesús; FERRER ANDRÉS, Berta, 2017, p. 481-482.

²⁷ FANNING, Sarah E., 2017.



Fig. 1. Robert Stevenson, “Jane is severely punished in front of her classmates at Lowood Institution”, *Jane Eyre*, 1944.

In light of the foregoing, the United States and the United Kingdom are the two countries where *Jane Eyre* has been most adapted to film. These adaptations, in which both renowned and not so well-known filmmakers and actors coincide, attempt to show the depth, the nuances, the diverse traits and the universe of someone as singular as Jane, for the most relevant characteristic of Charlotte Brontë’s character “is her personality that we could almost define as feminist, insofar as she tries to rebel against the fate that becoming ‘the wife of’ meant for women”.²⁸

The 1944 adaptation: Robert Stevenson

This Hollywood adaptation of the novel, starring Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles, was premiered in 1944. The physical appearance of these actors determined the image that the original characters would have in subsequent adaptations: Jane with a look of innocence and a sincere gaze, and Rochester with a strong appearance and a ruthless countenance. The film followed the American film industry’s trend towards adapting literary successes, even since the silent film age, when it began to collaborate with Broadway.²⁹ The film, realized in the classical Hollywood cinema, is quite focused on

the romance between the main characters,³⁰ it has a classic narrative structure and tells the story of Jane chronologically. For this reason, Jane narrates the incidents since she lived with her aunt-in-law, Mrs Reed, as a child, until she decided to remain by Rochester’s side after the destruction of Thornfield, even using intertitles taken from the novel.

Firstly, the iconography and sexuality of Jane are essential to the character’s filmic construction. At the beginning, she appears as a blond girl with a fragile appearance that clashes with her courageous character and the defence of her own ideals. Although the film shows that she comes from a well-to-do family, she is badly treated by her aunt, which is reflected in her very humble apparel in comparison with that of her cousin. This is even more marked at the boarding school to which Mrs Reed sends her, for she always wears a threadbare uniform, like the rest of the girls, among whom she only has one friend, Helen Burns, played by Elizabeth Taylor (Fig. 1).

After reaching adulthood and training as a school teacher, Jane has an attractive appearance, despite her demure apparel and Victorian hairstyle. This is the impression that she makes when arriving at Thornfield to take up the post of governess. As to her way of speaking and her manners, she is quiet and shy. Nonetheless, she has no qualms about firmly defending her views, whenever required. Curiously, this trait of hers is the one that Rochester admires most, confessing to her that she is very different from the women he has known. Jane does not undergo any notable iconographic transformation, although during the wedding sequence she wears a period wedding dress and a hairstyle replete with ringlets, which are both striking given her usual style. It can be claimed that her appearance is not sexualised and that she remains faithful to the model of a sober nineteenth-century governess. Nonetheless, when travelling with Rochester before the wedding, she is somewhat more sensual, for she laughs, exchanging knowing glances with him, and is wearing a light-coloured hat adorned with flowers. In this regard, it is appropriate to indicate that in this film Jane manifests a great illusion to get married, but everything vanished when, in the scene of the wedding, Rochester’s brother-in-law appears to stop it, for the character is already married with Bertha.

²⁸ SALAZAR BENÍTEZ, Octavio, 2015, p. 298.

²⁹ IGLESIAS SIMÓN, Pablo, 2008, p. 24.

³⁰ BONET SOLVES, Victoria; PIQUERAS GÓMEZ, María Jesús; FERRER ANDRÉS, Berta, 2017, p. 478.

Secondly, the psychological and sociological dimensions are essential for understanding Jane. She stands out for her strength, even at moments when she feels especially vulnerable. She demonstrates this as a child when leaving her aunt's house to go to Lowood Institution, for before passing through the gate, she turns and shouts, "Goodbye, Mrs. Reed. I hated you and hate everything about you! I'll never come and see you when I'm grown up, and I'll never call you Aunt! If anyone asks me how you treated me, I'll say you are bad, hard-hearted and mean. The very sight of you makes me sick!"³¹ (Fig. 2).

Despite her impetuosity, Jane's strength is combined with a calm character, which can be more clearly perceived when she is an adult. The scene that best reflects this is when she leaves Thornfield after discovering that Rochester is a married man, for although she feels hurt, she barely hesitates despite his pleas. Also, her most vulnerable moment occurs when she believes that he is going to dismiss her to marry another woman, Blanche. Her coherence and sincerity are reflected above all in her lofty sentiments and in the forthright way in which she expresses them, as she does at that moment between sobs, but decisively. The evolution that she undergoes is evinced when she returns to Thornfield to live with Rochester, who is now blind after the fire started by his mad wife. Because Bertha dies in the fire, now Jane and Rochester can be together. In this final scene it is shown the image of a more submissive Jane, who decides to stay with Rochester for love, but also to take care of him.

Socially speaking, Jane Eyre's status undergoes several changes during the plot. As in this adaptation, she comes from a well-to-do family, it is striking that she has been sent to rundown school until her coming of age. However, this experience helps her to understand that she is alone in the world and that she has to stand on her own two feet, which is the reason why she has studied to become a school teacher. Finally, during her absence from Thornfield she looks after her ailing aunt and inherits and auctions off her assets.³²

As to the analysis of her role, Jane embodies a typical English governess, but her disposition does not strictly dovetail with a prototype characterised by the imposition of strict discipline on children, while



Fig. 2. Robert Stevenson, "Jane listens with emotion to Rochester's marriage proposal", *Jane Eyre*, 1944.

being subservient to their parents. Thus, prompted by her desire to leave Lowood and face the world, she accepts the job that Rochester offers her and devotes her time to educating Adèle, the child who he has taken in, and who is actually her illegitimate daughter, but in this adaptation this is not indicated because of the moral censorship that the Hays Code imposed in Hollywood from 1933.³³ With this girl, to whom she teaches French and piano, Jane maintains a balance between knowledge and affection, something that was conspicuous by her absence at the boarding school. This smooths the way to a budding relationship between them, gradually creating a bond akin to that existing between mother and daughter. On the other hand, driven by her self-esteem and self-respect she decides to abandon Rochester, doubtless one of the most decisive actions that she takes. It is this same attribute that ultimately leads her to return to his side to begin a new life together.

As to her relationship with the other characters, during that stage of her life, Jane only manages to gain the attention of Bessie, her aunt's housekeeper, who fondly tells her before she leaves for boarding school that she is a "solitary and strange child";³⁴ the affection of Dr Rivers –the only per-

³¹ Jane enunciates these sentences between the minute 0:06:18 and the minute 0:06:32.

³² It is represented in the scene between the minute 1:30:28 and the minute 1:30:45.

³³ BLACK, Gregory D., 2012, p. 329.

³⁴ Bessie enounced this sentence between the minute 0:05:00 and the minute 0:05:54.

son who listens to and cares for her at Lowood; and the friendship of Helen. Unlike the novel, in this film, Rivers frequently visits Lowood due to his job as a doctor and establishes a friendship with Jane, being him the only person that offers affection to her –especially after Helen’s death– and he encourages her to study. The characters with which she establishes a negative and toxic relationship include her aunt, her cousin and the headmaster of the boarding school, the fanatic clergyman Brocklehurst, who publically humiliates her on numerous occasions. But Jane’s most complex relationship is with Rochester, with whom she is at first shy. Although she swiftly demonstrates her character, she is always respectful for she understands that he is her employer. For his part, Rochester sees in her an intelligent woman in whom he can confide his inner torment and is fascinated by the fact that she is real and that she is not attracted by his wealth. Both are independent, respect each other and recognise that there is no room for submission between them.

The 1996 adaptation: Franco Zeffirelli

The 1996 version directed by Zeffirelli focuses on the story of Jane Eyre since she was a child until she reaches adulthood, thus showing her evolution as a person. In this case, the film reflects a more classic and faithful version of the novel. In it is reproduced an intense romantic drama adapted to the gothic style recreated by Brontë, this is reflected both in the relations between Jane and Mr. Rochester and from the environmental point of view (the stages, the decoration, the clothing...). Beyond the descriptive aspect of Jane Eyre’s character, which we will see below, and even considering that it is one of the versions closer to the novel, we can observe how Jane’s character fits into the socio-cultural context of the nineties, when the film is released. In this sense, being a 1996 production, it is necessary to mention that this period was marked by the third wave of the feminist movement. Rebeca Walker, American writer and activist, understood this revolution as a movement itself with a multitude of new aspirations. This way, Zeffirelli builds a character that, while striking to the one created by Brontë, has a direct relationship with the social needs claimed by the feminist movement in the 1990s. The character of Jane Eyre created for the novel coincides with the profile of those women who in the 90s fought for equality, individuality and female independence; values that begin to be defended since the 60s and 70s. This way, we can affirm that the character created by Brontë is the antecedent of a social movement that would emerge a century later.

Then, while the character is described from an internal, iconographic and psychological dimension, we can see how Zeffirelli highlights different aspects that point towards the construction of a new female profile.

This film portrays the character’s construction from an inner perspective. The way of being and acting of the young woman, converted into a feminist icon, is the essence of the film starring Charlotte Gainsbourg and William Hurt in the roles of Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester.

As to her iconographic construction, Jane first appears as an orphan aged a little over five from humble beginnings. With the consent of her aunt, she is sent to an austere orphanage where through strict discipline she becomes a teenager with strong convictions and ideals. After completing her training, she is engaged as a governess by Rochester for Adèle in his capacity as her legal guardian (Fig. 3).

Throughout the film, the physical representation of Jane is interesting insofar as the visual aspects of the young woman, focusing on her apparel and her gestures, correspond to her identity. Soberness, precision, firmness and strength, as well as gentleness, are all adjectives that define both Jane’s personality and her actions and bearing. In this sense, and with the intention to show how Jane breaks with the traditional feminine patterns, it should be specified that, although the character is described as delicate, an adjective more typical of female stereotypes, at the same time it is linked to strength, an adjective that has traditionally been linked to the male figure.

In line with the above, and in relation to her sexuality, it can be said that, although Jane’s demeanour is more akin to that of a nun, as a result of the fact that she is true to her beliefs, her powerful convictions and her strong personality and character, she harbours a strong passion deep inside. This is clearly seen when, in spite of the ups and downs in her relationship with Rochester, she marries him, her love for him remaining intact.

From a more inner perspective, the character is constructed on a psychological basis. Jane is presented as a coherent woman whose actions correspond to her ideals. Although this link is palpable, and in the interest of her pretensions, she already behaved atypically for a girl of her age.

Jane has inner conflicts that allow her to develop as a person and reach her objectives. Through her self-determination, her non-conformism, her quest for knowledge and her struggle to gain visibility in

a world of men, Jane is shown as an independent woman dissatisfied with the socially imposed androcentric dictates.

Therefore, the young woman's origins, concerns, education and life experiences become the basic pillars of a personality that has been forged during a difficult and stormy childhood in which, after losing her parents, Jane has had to deal with the difficulties of living with her aunt. During that time, submission, contempt and psychological violence have been part and parcel of her daily existence, converting her into a strong person who rejects the subordination imposed on her as a child.

From a sociological point of view, mention should go to the external conflicts experienced by the character. Firstly, as a child Jane displays an antithetical personality to the impositions enforced on her, shown through her desire to free herself from the strict rules that prevent her from becoming and behaving like a free woman. After that, and focusing on her adult life, she comes up against androcentric social reality. This, together with her life at Mr Rochester's mansion and her job as a governess, where she is all but invisible, nurtures a constant feeling of rebellion in her.

As to the role that Jane plays throughout her evolution in Zeffirelli's film, we can observe: on the one hand, that of a rebellious child and, on the other, that of an independent woman combating the patriarchal system. Although the roles may seem different at first sight, the latter is no more than the materialisation of the former in adulthood. Consequently, the character's motivation can be glimpsed at the beginning of the story and is confirmed at the end: since her childhood, Jane has always had a free mind, an aspect that makes her different from other women. This is significant because this character, through her thoughts and behaviours, represents a breaking point with respect to the way of being and doing of other women of that time (Fig. 4).

Moving on to the stereotype represented in the film, now as an adult Jane is shown as a woman who breaks with traditional ideals for the sake of her full freedom. She is a talented and intelligent woman who sees how she has been relegated, due to social constraints, to a secondary role because of her sex. But she unflinchingly struggles to fulfil her expectations, for which reason she is presented as an icon in both the film world and gender studies.

Lastly, with respect to the type of relationships that Jane establishes with the other characters, it can be



Fig. 3. Franco Zeffirelli, "Jane shows her long hair to rebel against the director of Lowood", *Jane Eyre*, 1996.



Fig. 4. Franco Zeffirelli, "The wedding between Jane and Rochester is interrupted by Bertha's brother", Richard Mason, *Jane Eyre*, 1996.

said that these vary, fluctuating between hate and cordiality and vice versa. Thus, throughout her story it is essential to underscore two types of relationships that, while being different, are united by forgiveness and compassion. First and foremost, there is reference to the link between Jane and her aunt. While she is growing up, she has a stormy relationship with Mrs Reed, who refusing to take care of her, sends her to an orphanage. Until she receives a letter informing her of her aunt's grave illness, there has been no relationship between them whatsoever. In spite of the resentment that Jane feels towards her, she decides to answer her

call. This is when, through a letter, her aunt informs her that she is the heiress of his uncle's fortune. Jane remained impassive, but her firmness and her nature make her feel compassion for her aunt, leading to forgiveness.

As for her relationship with Rochester, at first it is cordial, although with a certain degree of sexual tension surrounded by a halo of respect in a quasi-paternal relationship. But then, Jane gradually contests his dominant position. Beyond the fact that this situation leads to an estrangement between them, it should be noted how she gives priority to herself and her personality over her feelings towards him. This fact is significant because it proves how Jane, in favor of equality, avoids creating a situation of domination, led by the man, leaving her in a position of inferiority and subordination. Finally, and in light of a tangible feeling of mutual desire that makes them forget their differences, the two characters acknowledge the love that they profess for each other. Thus, Jane is yet again prepared to understand, forgive and respect him, each of them accepting the other's nature and actions in harmonious coexistence.

The 2011 adaptation: Cary Fukunaga

With respect to the technical specifications of this British and American coproduction premiered in 2011, it was directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, whose aesthetic vision is as important as the story per se. The purpose of the film remains the same as in previous versions: offer a new interpretation of Charlotte Brontë's story in its classic context, in this case through a very remarkable aestheticism, since the careful audiovisual treatment receives as much prominence as the story itself. The interiors are shown in a dark and oppressive way, the exteriors generally show the inclemency of the moors and a British landscape dominated by gray, but on certain occasions the sun's rays are used to show the state of happiness of the characters.

As there are so many adaptations of Jane Eyre, the production choices can mark the differential factor of the film, starting with the casting decisions. The film stars two popular actors: Mia Wasikowska y Michael Fassbender. In the case of Mia Wasikowska, the choice of this actress may be associated with the phenomenon of "celebrity intertextuality",³⁵ in this case as a model of the nineteenth-century

heroine, whose very presence is enough to evoke a cultural discourse in different period productions featuring a non-conformist female role, as is the case in *Madame Bovary* (2014) and *Crimson Peak* (2015); therefore, its introduction in the Victorian narrative may favour the acceptance of an audiovisual proposal, since the actress may result familiar to the spectator in nineteenth-century speeches. Curiously enough, her physiognomy corresponds to an unusually modern female image: she is slim, attractive, but not voluptuous, even with some androgynous features. In this sense, Jane's appearance can coincide more with her original conception of the novel, in which she is described as woman not particularly attractive, than with the other audiovisual versions, in which the protagonist is a model of classic beauty, as in the case of Joan Fontaine in the version of the year 1944. In the leading male role, the German-Irish actor Michael Fassbender breaks with the usual representation of Mr. Rochester, generally regarded as unattractive. In this respect, González claims that the actor's appeal and the shots dedicated to his character convert him into a privileged object of sexual observation for both Jane and the audience,³⁶ thus breaking with the Mulvey an model of gendered spectatorship known as the "male gaze" in relation to the Hollywood film narrative, which indicates that only women should be framed or objectified for the satisfaction of male audiences.³⁷ Keeping this in mind, the sexualization of the male character is, in this version, superior to the one of the female character.

The first indicator concentrates on the character's iconography and sexuality. Jane, the absolute focus of the story, is shown as a girl and as a young woman, with much more footage being dedicated to the second stage in which she arrives at Thornfield Mansion to take up her post as governess than in the first stage of her life, which includes her childhood and her first years of education. Although the actress is attractive, neither does she have a particularly relevant physical presence nor does she use complements to enhance her beauty, but she dresses with the self-restraint and modesty expected of a governess. In this connection, it is significant how, during a conversation with Rochester, he places a flower in her hair, a gallant gesture that is nonetheless disturbing for Jane. Concerning her manners, she is reflective, passing

³⁵ STAM, Robert; BURGOYNE, Robert; FLITTERMAN-LEWIS, Sandy, 1999, p. 236.

³⁶ GONZÁLEZ, Tecla, 2018, p. 154.

³⁷ MULVEY, Laura, 1992, p. 22.



Fig. 5. Cary Fukunaga, “Jane has a more austere look in this adaptation”, *Jane Eyre*, 2011.

most of the time in silence, without talking about banalities; as occurs in the original work, “her silence will turn into speech”³⁸ (Fig. 5).

During the film, there is no significant change in her way of dressing, but this is indeed used in a symbolic way, the colour of her apparel varying slightly depending on her mood: dark grey when she feels sad or unmotivated, light grey when she feels calmer and a mixture of different tones of grey when she is worried. At two crucial moments, her clothes are used to underscore changes in her life and, therefore, in her social status: Jane relinquishes her pretty dress when she arrives at the boarding school and returns to that world when she receives her delicate wedding gown. As an aesthetic conclusion to this tonal progression, Jane returns to Thornfield at the end of the film wearing discrete, but better quality (owing to her social advancement), clothes in warmer tones, evidenced for example, by her dress with ornaments and borders, printed in ochre tones, as well as the marching golden hat that she holds in the hand before meeting with Mr. Rochester. Neither is her appearance sexualised, nor is she shown under an asexual light, being portrayed as a “woman with sexual desires”,³⁹ for following Rochester’s proposal

of marriage to her, she kisses him passionately in the garden and inside the mansion. There are even interpretations that suggest a loss of virginity in this film.⁴⁰ Other moments reveal a certain sexuality in Jane and a vindication of intimate space, as revealed by her body language when she takes her leave of Mr Rochester –after saving him from the fire and after removing the flower that he has placed in her hair.

For the purpose of discovering the character’s construction from a deeper perspective, analysing the psychological and sociological dimensions, Jane’s most remarkable character trait is that she always acts in consistency with her principles. She is a kind, sensible, educated, sober, reserved, brave and very sincere young woman. Similarly, some scenes dwell on her melancholy, best conveyed through gestures than through dramatic expressions. She keeps to herself and is introspective, but it is obvious that she conceals a restless spirit, telling Mrs Fairfax, “I wish a woman could have action in her life, like a man”. The most interesting aspect of her representation are the different moments at which she expresses her independence in words: “I am a free human being with an independent will”, “I must respect myself”, “To

³⁸ FREEMAN, Janet H., 1984, p. 683.

³⁹ GONZÁLEZ, Tecla, 2018, p. 154.

⁴⁰ GONZÁLEZ, Tecla, 2018, p. 154.

marry you would kill me"; her main aim is always to maintain her spirit free from economic or social attachments that go against her moral judgement.

In relation to the character's social representation, although at the beginning Jane is shown to be from a good family, her aunt is quick to send her to an unassuming school. She soon realises that she must rely on herself to survive, for which reason she decides to work, first as a governess and then as a school teacher in a hamlet, although in the third act she discovers that she is a wealthy heiress. The main external conflicts that she experiences are a result of the fact that she was rejected by her family during her childhood, for which reason she wants the Rivers to be her family. While in the novel, the family relationship between the Rivers and Jane ends up being discovered, in the film version that coincidence does not occur, so her inclusion in the small family is due to personal connection wishes, not linked to blood ties.

As to her role, Jane rebels against the prototype of the unmarried and impersonal governess dictated by Victorian society, reflecting the Brontë sisters' personal vindications deriving from their own life experiences in the character. Specifically, this film places the accent on Jane's sincerity and firmness, not letting Rochester intimidate her with his continuous provocations and reacting to his marriage proposal more with anger (fearing that she is being mocked) than with the sadness reflected in other versions. The film also highlights her competence as a governess, behaving kindly and patiently towards Adèle, whose relationship is shown to be affectionate at a physical level (Fig. 6).

With respect to the actions that are represented, it should be observed that the film's narrative structure is circular with an epilogue, namely, it starts late in the story and tells how Jane has reached that vital moment, alternating this with memories of her childhood. Therefore, the interest lies in understanding how the character has ended up in such a dire situation. In this sense, by introducing the character at her most tragic moment, it is even more surprising for the audience: the character is represented in the middle of an existential crisis, but as the film progresses, her rigidity, patience and calm is shown, consequently the spectator judges that an extremely dramatic moment must have happened to modify her behaviour that way.

As to Jane's relationships with the other characters, these are positive (her friend Helen Burns, Mrs Fair-

fax, Adèle and the Rivers sisters) and negative (her aunt) with the story's female characters, but it is the two male characters who unsuccessfully try to bend her to their will. On the one hand, the main relationship is between Jane and Rochester. The firmness shown by Wasikowska, in contrast to the turbulent personality that Fassbender gives his character, converts their relationship into a dialectic battle of wills in which there is trust and closeness between them, but also a certain degree of caution resulting from their inability to indulge or dominate each other. On the other hand, Mr Rivers wants to marry Jane, who rejects his proposal, whereby the clergyman reproaches her, accusing her of using "neither feminine nor true" words, although Mr. Rivers admired Jane, he finds in her a strong will and a vital determination that are inadequate in a woman. Finally, he is abandoned by her in the middle of the wasteland when Jane "thinks she listens" that Mr. Rochester is calling her from the distance; Mr. Rivers is completely unable to detain her, despite he uses all the resources he possesses as a cleric, and as a man, to subdue her morally, even reminding her that "offending him she offends God".

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite telling the same story, each one of the film adaptations analysed here possesses a different narrative and aesthetic style that affects the representation of Jane Eyre. Likewise, the character's evolution depends on the cinematography and the moment at which each adaptation was made. This explains why in the 1944 version Jane acts in a more docile and maternal fashion when she returns to Rochester's side and discovers that he is blind –while in the 1996 and 2011 adaptations this is not so clear– because the roles of female characters in classic cinema were strongly associated with the emotional realm and caring for and protecting the family. Thus, this film focuses more on the novel's melodramatic aspects, much to the taste of classic Hollywood cinema and, above all, on the hardships, scorn and loneliness suffered by Jane when she was a child and on her feelings towards Rochester, the mystery surrounding his wife and the relationship between the main characters, when she is already an adult. Although both have a strong personality, in the end the couple begin a traditional and conventional love affair.

For his part, Zeffirelli prefers to underscore Jane's evolution as a person. It can be observed how her identity as an adult is no more than the result of her life experiences and conflicts with contempo-



Fig. 6. Cary Fukunaga, “Rochester, with passion and desire, proposes to Jane”, *Jane Eyre*, 2011.

rary society: the orphan who has had a traumatic childhood and stands out for her radical and non-conformist character in certain situations becomes a courageous woman with self-determination and strong ideas about gender equality. Throughout this process, the orphanage is understood as a key space in which that transformation occurs, which is striking since, considering that it is governed by traditional and authoritarian rules, Jane grows up, develops personally, trains as a professional and frees herself physically, intellectually and ideologically. As a result of her evolution, and from a feminist perspective, it is important to underscore her attitude when she decides to abandon Rochester (despite being in love with him), for she does not share his impositions. This fact demonstrates and reinforces the capacity of independence of this female character, who places her personal wellbeing and ideals above love. Notwithstanding, the film ends up showing that Jane has created a family with him. This is interesting because when *Jane Eyre* was created by Brontë, she represented an independent woman, although she belonged to the second half of the nineteenth century, a moment in which there was not much to do in the fight for the emancipation of women. In spite of the aspiration of some women, the social impositions forced them to have to adapt to what prevailed in the cultural context of the time; this is reflected both in the novel and in the films of Stevenson and Zeffirelli, and it is denounced by Jane in Fukunaga’s version.

Moving on to Fukunaga’s adaptation, it places the spotlight on Jane’s defiant personality, as well as

reflecting her independence more than in the other two films. Her capacity for survival and decisive character is evinced in her work as a school teacher, once she has got over the trauma suffered at Thornfield. As a sort of male compensation, Rochester ceases to be such an authoritarian and fearsome person to become a haunted figure, suffering a transformation deriving from that of his female partner. Likewise, without being totally explicit, the sensuality of the relationship between Jane and Rochester carries more weight than in the previous versions, which doubtless has to do with a more modern and positive interpretation of female sexuality.

The three films demonstrate the different nature and acts of women throughout the history of Western society. From a feminist point of view, the evolution of female stereotypes can be clearly observed: a solitary, sympathetic and maternal woman in 1944; a woman with a restless mind who prepares herself and fights for her ideals in 1996; and an independent woman in 2011.

With respect to the physical incarnation of Jane, casting and script choices determine the character’s spirit from the start. It should be pointed out that the faces, physical appearance and acting of the three actresses playing Jane –Joan Fontaine, Charlotte Gainsbourg and Mia Wasikowska– are closely linked to the film structure, in addition to representing different beauty standards –the classic Hollywood canon in the first version, a blander appeal in the second and a certain androgyny in

the third. Thus, although the female author describes the main character in detail, it can be clearly observed that “the film character is always the sum of the actor and the character designed by the script”, and that, consequently, “the choice of the actor is now the first approach to the construction of the character”.⁴¹ In view of these considerations it is possible to claim that Jane Eyre is considered to be a feminist icon, although, due to the narrative structures and the female roles of classic Hollywood cinema, this can be more plainly observed in the 1996 and 2011 versions.

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