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**'BRONTE AND FILM'**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as television and cinema became the prominent means of entertainment there were many literary adaptations that took place. Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) has been remediated into film series, screenplays and stage productions quite a few times. This review discusses the representation of *Jane Eyre* in the most noted cinematic adaptations which include Robert Stevenson's 1943 *Jane Eyre*, Julian Amyes's 1983 version, Francis Zeffirelli's 1996 rendition and 2006 BBC's mini-film series of the novel. Each adaptations have added something new or has omitted something compared to the novel including the representation of Bertha Mason's character and that of Jane herself.

The representation of the character, Bertha Mason, has varied in each film adaptation with some adhering to the non-human Gothic characterization of Bertha as narrated by Jane in the novel while some portray her more as a rational figure than a savage animal. Kristen L. Parkinson discusses in her article, "Mrs. Rochester's story: Francis Zeffirelli's Adaptation of *Jane Eyre*" the way Zeffirelli portrays the events of the novel from multiple perspectives, specifically giving more attention to Bertha, thus enabling the viewer's view of the novel in a different and critical aspect. "Zeffirelli's film, however, incorporates an alternative perspective of Bertha and thus of Jane by exploiting film's shift in point of view." The 1996 adaptation is the first film version of *Jane Eyre* that portrayed Bertha Mason as a character independent from the demonizing and degrading aspects related to her in the novel by Jane's description of her as a "clothed hyena". Parkinson comments on the fact that even though Bertha's character is an important one in criticism yet she is viewed nothing more than a "Gothic foil against which the "narrating self" of Jane Rochester defines her own maturation and fulfillment." The film deviates from the novel while presenting the scene where the two characters meet which is described by Gilbert and Gubar as "the novel's central confrontation". Parkinson state that Zeffirelli rejects the "Victorian

representation of Bertha as devil and/or whore, thus aligning our sympathies with her as much as Jane.” Bertha is still given the appearance of a wild and unstable character yet she is shown in a room full of natural light instead of being “shrouded or shadowed” to make her seem harmful. Barbara Nelson in her article “Faces of Jane” also refers to the representation of the madwoman in Zeffirelli’s film version where she states “for the first time in the film history of *Jane Eyre*, audiences were able to see Bronte's madwoman in the light of apparent day and in full facial view.” Both the articles mentioned previously discuss the use of cinematography where the director draws parallel between Jane and Bertha through series of shot/reverse shots establishing a connection between them as doubles of each other. The connection is further developed as the shot/reverse shot showcase both of them wearing white colored garments – Bertha in a white nightgown and Jane in her wedding dress – which makes the viewers disassociate derogatory terms like ‘clothed hyena’ with Bertha’s character and presenting her in a new light as a victim rather than the object of danger. Conforming to Parkinson and Nelson’s viewpoint, the particular additions in the film version humanizes the character of Bertha, making her appear in a new light and thus, questioning the reliability of Jane’s narrative in the novel.

While Parkinson solely focuses on the 1996 adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, Barbara Nelson compares Zeffirelli’s film version to other remediated versions as well. “Although Zeffirelli's adaptation draws on Robert Stevenson's 1944 classic in many respects, it stands as a study in contrast.” Stevenson employs many elements that present the character of Bertha as a Gothic character just like portrayed by Bronte in her novel. “With the use of film-noir lighting and loud and ominous music to signal the danger that Bertha represents.” The madwoman is never seen in the 1943 version and Parkinson also comments on Bertha’s lack of proper appearance on-screen while comparing to the 1996 version as she states, “Bertha is not shrouded or shadowed, a lighting

technique other adaptations use to make her seem mysterious and dangerous.” While both film versions present the character of Bertha in different perspectives Nelson states that both directors have omitted important scenes that could have established the connection between Jane and Bertha more strongly. “Absent is the scene in which the madwoman enters Jane's bedroom puts on Jane's wedding veil and then tears it in two.” Nelson goes on to comment on representation of Bertha in other cinematic version, for example, Julian Amyes’s 1983 version displays “no interest” in presenting Bertha Mason as a double of Jane – “alterego”. In the BBC 2006 version of *Jane Eyre*, directed by Susanna White, the character of Bertha Mason is cast in an entirely new light. In Nelson words, “a woman of apparent elegance appears, sitting at a writing desk. Her grand gesture of the hand and her smile seems a welcoming sign indicating hospitality and good breeding. However, the tense audio and fragmented editing, which cuts quickly from one agitated face to another, suggests fear and danger.” Both the articles point towards a development in Bertha’s character in each remediated version of the novel which changes our perception of the “madwoman” each time.

Moreover, other than the representation of Bertha’s character, the presentation of Jane also changes from version to version as a character and as a narrative. Elizabeth Atkins in her article “Jane Eyre Transformed” lists down many omissions done in the 1943 *Jane Eyre* adaptation by Stevenson that “the screenplay writers, in their attempts to condense the novel, edited out Bronte's entire purpose of demonstrating the ability of women to be psychologically independent.” The most crucial omission is of Jane’s life after leaving Thornfield. During that period of being away from Thornfield Jane “finds her identity, which allows her to make decisions guiltlessly and without coercion.” Jane gains an inheritance and “discovers long-lost relations”. The omission doesn’t present her as growing more into as an independent individual

rather yet deliberately highlights her dependence on others for survival thus, opposing the whole concept of feminism as Bronte presented in her novel. Atkins blatantly titles the 1943 version as “complete disaster” and finds that “there seems to be a deliberate move away from Bronte's precocious Victorian feminism. By taking away Jane's psychological and material independence, and all that precipitates it, Jane Eyre becomes a simple romance.” In comparison, the 1996 Zefferilli’s film version questions Jane’s position in history as a proto-feminist literary figure in throughout.

In conclusion, each cinematic version discussed in the articles showcase a drastic change from the novel itself showing effects of the process of remediation itself. As the world moves into the modern era changes are seen in depiction of characters in every adaptation. The most prominent change is seen in the characterization of Bertha Mason where Zefferilli’s film, in my opinion, presents an accurate picture of her while deviating from the novel’s first point narrative form.

References:

- 1) Atkins, Elizabeth. *Literature Film Quarterly: Jane Eyre Transformed*. 21 Vol. Salisbury State College, 1993. Web. 1 Dec. 2017.
- 2) Nelson, Barbara. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies: Faces of Jane Eyre*. 1 Vol. Addleton Academic Publishers, 2011. Web. 1 Dec. 2017.
- 3) Parkinson, Kirsten L. *Literature Film Quarterly: Mrs. Rochester's Story: Franco Zeffirelli's Adaptation of Jane Eyre*. XLIII Vol. Salisbury State College, 01/01/2015. Web. 1 Dec. 2017.