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## The Madwoman and the Blindman

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Bolt, David, et al.

The Madwoman and the Blindman: Jayne Eyre, Discourse, Disability.

The Ohio State University Press, 2013.

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## VISIONS OF ROCHESTER

Screening Desire and Disability in  
*Jane Eyre*

MARTHA STODDARD HOLMES

AS THE OTHER CHAPTERS demonstrate, *Jane Eyre*, particularly in its resolution, is significantly concerned with disability. Jane's assumptions about disability as a source of dependency (for the disabled person) and service (for his or her loved ones) are familiar and still conventional. These assumptions, in turn, have been shared for decades by critics, whose interpretive work regarding the role of disability in *Jane Eyre* continues to gestate through an abundance of film and television adaptations (more than twenty screen versions since 1910, with a new release in spring 2011). Given the novel's emphasis on visuality and embodiment, and the thriving relationship with its filmic offspring, the cultural impact of *Jane Eyre* and the exploration of disability themes within its narrative must be considered with reference to visual as well as verbal versions. Indeed, an important minor thread in *Jane Eyre* and Brontë scholarship is film criticism.<sup>1</sup> Despite the centrality of disability and embodiment to written and screen

1. Fansites are a strong part of this critical community, including numerous blogs that catalog and comment on screen versions. Interposed between fan blogs and academic journals is the Brontë Society, a long-standing appreciation society that has—like many of the appreciation societies—an increasingly scholarly element. It has published film criticism since 1944 in its journal. See Stoneman for the authoritative collection of explorations of Brontë culture; see also Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann.

versions, however, most film criticism does not consider disability as a key element in plot, characterization, or dialogue, much less within the cinematographic grammar of gender and power. As such, it tends to miss what is most interesting—and most progressive—about the film versions: that all grapple, consciously or otherwise, with deeply engraved social fears and values regarding disability and desire. In an effort to focus on this gap and initiate discourse around these subjects, this chapter undertakes readings of disability and embodiment in a number of iconic screen adaptations of *Jane Eyre*—the 1944 film directed by Robert Stevenson and starring Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles; the 1983 BBC miniseries directed by Julian Amyes and starring Zelah Clarke and Timothy Dalton; the 1996 film directed by Franco Zeffirelli and starring Charlotte Gainsbourg and William Hurt; the 1997 A&E miniseries directed by Robert Young and starring Samantha Morton and Ciáran Hinds; and the 2006 BBC miniseries directed by Susanna White and starring Ruth Wilson and Toby Stephens<sup>2</sup>—and investigates the most significant paradigms of disability and embodiment in the existing renditions on screen. It considers both the progressive possibilities that emerge and the enduring unease with which filmmakers and their audiences approach the representation of disability and bodily difference.

In academic contexts, where the main *Jane Eyre* text is usually literary, teachers regularly use screen interpretations of the novel to spark student engagement, illuminate key themes, and invite consideration of page-to-screen challenges and interpretive issues. However, since the enjoyment of nineteenth-century novels requires some effort and persistence on the part of a twenty-first century reader, many people outside the classroom may only “know” *Jane Eyre* through a screen version. *Jane Eyre* is an inviting text for the screen because of its embodied, highly visual narrative style and its recurrent thematic concern with bodies—how they look, how we look at them, and how they connect. The word *flesh* recurs some thirty-one times in the novel, and, to borrow Chivers and Markotić’s term, *Jane Eyre* is from its earliest chapters focused on a spectrum of “problem bodies” with profound range, complexity, and interrelatedness. While Rochester memorably describes the “queer feeling” of “a string somewhere under my left

2. These versions are critically acclaimed and/or in active circulation through public libraries and video rental companies such as Netflix. While the 1970 British Lion television production directed by Delbert Mann and starring Susannah York and George C. Scott has generated substantial interest, it is no longer readily available for purchase or rental, at least in the United States, and thus not a focus of this chapter, which aims to be accessible to readers interested in viewing and possibly using film versions of the novel. While the 2011 Focus Features film directed by Cary Fukunaga and starring Mia Wasakowska and Michael Fassbender appeared too late for full discussion in this essay, I discuss it briefly in a later note.

ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of [Jane's] little frame," theirs are hardly the only linked bodies in the novel (291; ch. 23).<sup>3</sup> The abused and "passionate" child-body of its plain protagonist; the "majestic [ . . . ] dark as a Spaniard" Blanche Ingram; and the Creoled, "mad," and animalized body of Bertha Mason seem no less interlinked than Rochester's "stern features and heavy brow" and the "Grecian profile" of St. John Rivers (134; ch. 12 and 508; ch. 37). As Elizabeth Donaldson has argued, the novel relies on "juxtapositions between normative and non-normative bodies, between the accidental and the congenital, between masculine rationality and feminine embodiment, and between melancholy and raving madness. Reading the body is a central practice in *Jane Eyre*" ("The Corpus of the Madwoman," 102). Julia Miele Rodas, similarly, has argued for the physiological likeness between Bertha and Rochester as well as between Bertha, Grace Poole, and Blanche Ingram ("Brontë's *Jane Eyre*").<sup>4</sup>

Given that Brontë's physiognomic emphasis in *Jane Eyre* includes recurrent views of the faces and bodies of all the significant characters, the novel provides substantial direction for its own translation from a verbal medium into the primarily visual one of film/television. Jane's narration is precisely descriptive, lending itself to stage directions, props, casting, and makeup. Its emphasis on looking (particularly Jane's looking at others) suggests camera orientations for point-of-view shots. Indeed, in its recurrent visuality and self-consciousness about the visual, the novel seems to invite representation in visual media despite being published some fifty years before the invention of cinema. The four scenes that construct disability illustrate both how films have taken careful direction from Brontë (and from earlier film versions) and also how they have diverged from the novel and from each other.

At the same time, *Jane Eyre* poses some fairly significant challenges for mainstream film and television, given that its continuing popularity hinges partly on its core plot of a *plain* heroine finding love and money. "Plain" Jane Eyre and "ugly" Edward Rochester are marketing problems in a cul-

3. The version of the primary text referred to in this chapter is Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 2006).

4. A fuller analysis of film versions would attend to each film's casting choices for these interlinked bodies. For example, there is wide variation not only in the casting of Rochester and Jane, but (much more so) in the casting of Bertha, who in the Zeffirelli 1996 and White 2006 versions is clearly beautiful; in others, barely visible under a mass of hair; and in the always curious 1947 version, dressed like a genteel lady of the house, with her hair up, enquiring if she and Edward are going to be married again. The Bertha-Rochester body language is also worth analysis; in several versions, the notion of her jealousy of Jane is more developed than others, and in the 1997 version, he is tender to her, holding her and kissing her head after her outburst.

tural climate in which producers and viewers of popular film and television narratives (*Ugly Betty*, for example) typically denote “ugliness” by putting thick spectacles and orthodontic devices on otherwise conventionally attractive people, with the implication that as long as we can easily see it as located in discrete, removable components, “ugliness” is a transitory state that resides on the highly mutable visible surfaces of the social body. We are willing to suspend our disbelief in the character’s ugliness because we don’t truly have to suspend it at all. Rochester’s multidimensional “ugliness,” in contrast, presents a series of tough questions for cinema and television to address with casting, makeup, script, and direction.<sup>5</sup>

Even more significantly, the novel—and particularly its last few chapters—requires decisions about the visual representation of disability. Disablement is an important layer in Rochester’s characterization, from Jane’s initial encounter with him to the novel’s close. Their first meeting engenders a temporary impairment, when Rochester’s horse slips and throws him; Jane must aid her future employer, whose ankle is sprained, to remount, a prosthetic relationship that recurs as the novel draws to a close. After seeing the burnt ruins of Thornfield Hall, Jane learns that her former master has been made “stone-blind” and “a cripple” in a fire set by his “mad” wife Bertha and is called, once again, to support Rochester in his impaired condition (494; ch. 36). How to represent Rochester’s disablement remains a fascinating question and opportunity for screen versions of the novel. Enactment of disability-inflected scenes is informed and complicated not only by the question of “faithfulness” to the written texts but also by various audience- and culture-based challenges. A mass-marketed production needs to provoke desire—both in Jane and Rochester, and in the audience as sutured to Jane and/or Rochester—sufficient to the plausibility of the ending in the context of popular expectations about a romance plot and its key personnel.

In negotiating these demands, most film representations of Rochester’s disability focus on dependency, without considering other functions that disability, seen as a continuum and a set of variations on human distinction, might have for the narrative. Most film versions assume that disability means the end of sexuality, or else can only envision disabled sexuality within narrow limits. These expectations accord with a convention—dated

5. Physical appearance aside, for much of the novel he is rude, abrasive, cold, and simply unkind—disturbing, above all, not simply in his teasing of the besotted Jane but in his treatment of his “mad” wife Bertha. Even Jane, whose affinity for Rochester is at the start predicated on his “frown [and] roughness,” must correct him and remind him of the cruelty of his “vindictive antipathy” for his wife, who cannot help her condition (134; ch. 12 and 347; ch. 27). Any of the dimensions of his disgust for Bertha, which intertwines sexism, racism, ableism, and colonialism, offers a cinematic production of *Jane Eyre* a hefty obstacle.

at least from the nineteenth century and the reification of disabled people as objects of charity—that disabled people are not sexual people.<sup>6</sup>

This is hardly Brontë’s message. While the Jane of the novel ultimately becomes Rochester’s “right hand” and “the apple of his eye,” the couple first has a series of conversations about disability that lead to and enable the happy ending of marriage (519; ch. 38). Jane and Rochester’s discussions about marriage and disability are much less conventional and have been much less thoroughly explored than the desexualized characterization of disability referenced above. In fact, the novel’s distinctive enactment of desire *for* disability—not simply as that which mobilizes gendered power shifts or presents an opportunity for service but as a form of the *difference* that is part of the “sexual aesthetic”—is as innovative and important today as it was in 1847.<sup>7</sup> While the original text cannot be said to endorse a vision of the disabled Rochester as unsexed, the resilience of this interpretation—that sex and disability are mutually exclusive spheres—inflects *Jane Eyre* films and critical studies, and thus is ignored at the mainstream filmmaker’s peril. In short, those film analyses of *Jane Eyre* that address disability extend and reinforce what the films themselves often tell us about common assumptions about the meaning and nature of disability; both film and film criticism tell us more about popular constructions of disability than they do about Brontë’s use of disability in the novel.

Aficionados often see popular screen versions of *Jane Eyre* as providing “faithful” or “unfaithful” renditions of the novel. They may also be considered as endorsing or correcting the longstanding critical argument that Brontë uses disability symbolically as the only way to level Rochester’s power and enable her vision of egalitarian marriage. My reading of these films is not invested in weighing in on those issues. Rather, I am fascinated by screen versions’ repetition of conventions derived from popular beliefs about disability, from other screen versions, and, to some extent, from the novel. Scripts, acting, and direction reveal resilient ideas about disability, including anger and pity as obligatory gatekeepers to a happy ending

6. As Higashi argues, film versions often capitulate to the “narcotic” power of the romantic formula in which women are “encouraged to daydream about masterful lovers but not to analyze the realities of power in their relationships with men” (28). Paulson traces the connections between sight and sexuality in eighteenth-century French melodrama. Hahn argues both for a “subversive sensualism” associated with disability and for charity culture’s desexualization of disabled adults (27). See Siebers’s *Disability Theory* for a discussion of nondisabled people’s resistance to disabled people’s sexuality and the ways in which a disability-inflected, disability-authored sexual culture contributes to the positive transformation of bodies and sexuality more generally; see also McRuer and Mollow.

7. Rodas, e-mail message to the author, June 10, 2010. Thanks to Rodas for suggesting this useful term as a way to describe Jane and Rochester’s relational dynamics.

between a blind man and a sighted woman, and the implication (by almost entirely erasing that part of the book) that desire for an amputated Rochester is queerly outside the limits of what filmmakers expect their audiences to imagine.

## ROCHESTER ON HORSEBACK

The plethora of screen versions that have encountered the challenge of representing Rochester as concurrently “ugly,” disabled, and desirable create an opportunity to reflect on the larger place of desire, difference, and embodiment in text and culture, through four key scenes that construct his disabled self, approaching bodily difference by a combination of the conventional, the innovative, and the divergent. Thus, in the pages to come, I examine the way film adaptations approach the following scenes: Jane’s first meeting with Rochester when he falls from his horse; her first encounter with him in Thornfield Hall; her first sight of Thornfield—and then Rochester—after the fire that has damaged both; and finally, the scene that reestablishes Jane and Rochester’s relationship as lovers. Against this fairly consistent ground, the films often enact choices noticeably at odds with the novel and/or with each other in ways that illuminate the cultural construction of disability.

Jane’s first meeting with Rochester characterizes him in terms of his embodiment, both its athleticism and its vulnerability. The scene also establishes the physical nature of Jane’s attraction to Rochester. She focuses first on his body (as he sits on a stile, in pain) and next on his face:

His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now; he was past youth, but had not reached middle-age; perhaps he might be thirty-five. (134; ch. 12)

While distinctly distancing herself from any interest beyond “being useful, or at least officious,” Jane authorizes her somewhat bold and familiar scrutiny with the statement that “[h]ad he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to thus stand questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked” (134; ch. 12). Here, the novel forges an important theme of Jane’s sexuality; it is Rochester’s

“roughness” and misalignment with gendered ideals of beauty—his embodied “difference”—that generates the sense of ease and familiarity that spurs her attraction.

The scene, then, establishes an important instance of Jane and Rochester’s sexual aesthetic, including an appreciation of their shared divergence from standard beauty and comportment. Antagonism, often based on their awareness of their class and power differences and their willingness to test the implied boundaries, is also established as a part of their dynamic. In this one scene, as Rochester transitions from high on horseback to low on the ground and his horse falls on top of him, a host of ideological implications are suggested by the fact that the powerful, muscular master is dependent upon the small servant for help.<sup>8</sup> Filmmakers have made much of this power shift and of the physical and class contrasts between two characters who are briefly connected by temporary disability. Stevenson’s production creates a template for many later films with a scene that has the emotional muscularity of a Delacroix and, despite divergences, is relatively faithful to the novel.<sup>9</sup> In this version, director of photography George Barnes renders the suddenness of Rochester’s arrival on horseback by working dramatically with camera angles (as will all later versions): high-angle shots make the horse and man loom even larger, while low-angle shots of Jane from the back make her a small silhouette in cloak and bonnet. After Rochester falls, the two characters’ dramatic divergence in levels is erased. This scene includes a series of same-level close-ups suggesting parity between Jane and the man she does not know is her employer and toward whom, according to the novel, she feels “no fear [ . . . ] and but little shyness” (134; ch. 12).<sup>10</sup> Shot/reverse-shot editing, which lets us see each face from the other character’s perspective, adds to this sense of mutuality.

Cinematography is often defined as writing with light and motion, and lighting and camera distance used together are crucial to the visual grammar of Jane and Rochester’s relationship in all film versions. A distinctive feature of Stevenson’s film is its use of lighting to present characters as emotionally open or impenetrable and to chart their power dynamics accordingly. This

8. Rodas, e-mail message to author, June 10, 2010. As Rodas has reminded me, there is some degree of fetishization of class and power differences, with Jane’s insistence on calling Rochester “master” despite his explicit refusal to treat her as an inferior.

9. See Sconce for a fascinating history of the adaptation.

10. This stands in contrast to Welles’s expressivist aesthetic in which compositional elements (i.e., *mise-en-scène*: characters, props, the set, lighting, and camera orientation) rather than close-ups articulate his or her situation and psychology. See Campbell for a discussion of Welles’s instrumentality in the film despite not being the director of record. A subtler expressivism characterizes Fukunaga’s version as well.



is particularly the case in the close-ups of Jane and Rochester's faces in this first encounter, where complementary lighting, with Rochester's face lit on the right side and Jane's on the left, makes the viewer's eye connect the two characters, building an affinity between them. Facial orientation and eye contact enhance this effect. A face filmed straight on performs openness and potential vulnerability or engagement, contributing to the illusion of eye contact—or its sense of possibility. Just as in an encounter with an actual person, a viewer or character's encounter with a film face is an event in which relationships are instantly established, even between strangers such as Jane and Rochester.

Later productions reiterate this moment and its literal and figurative levels of power. They also include something Stevenson's film does not—a shot of Rochester using Jane to limp to his horse—a device which further dramatizes both their difference in height (and class status) and their unexpected relationship, as well as foreshadowing his later disablement and her role as his prosthesis (ch. 38). Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre* gives an even stronger dynamic of differences marked and later muted, by providing not only shot/reverse-shot sequences that view Rochester from a high angle and Jane from a low one (sometimes over his shoulder) but also shots incorporating both characters (i.e., a “two-shot”), making them equals in the same cinematic frame.

Levels are an important issue for the representation of dis/ability, particularly those disabilities whose distinctive qualities include situating a person above or below the mainstream level for standing or walking. While a concern for representing disability and desire is probably not the catalyst, an emphasis on low and high in the aesthetic of representing Rochester and Jane distinguishes all film versions and lends itself to the representation of not only class and gender but also disability. This same aesthetic becomes much more complex in cinematic renderings of the first formal meeting between the two characters.

## ROCHESTER'S CHAIR

Jane's first formal introduction to Rochester occurs at the end of the same day as their surprise encounter. This encounter takes place within the physical and social constraints of Thornfield Hall, in the drawing room, where he lies “half-reclined on a couch,” his “foot supported by the cushion” (141; ch. 8). Jane's description of Rochester is even more detailed than that in the horseback scene, expressly creating him as an object of her gaze. Starting

with his face, her words (and eyes) move down her employer's body, leading the reader through a sustained moment of increasing intimacy:

I knew my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows; his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognised his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, cholera; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw—yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake. His shape, now divested of cloak, I perceived harmonised in squareness with his physiognomy: I suppose it was a good figure in the athletic sense of the term—broad-chested and thin-flanked, though neither tall nor graceful. (141; ch. 8)

Relentlessly evaluative and comparative, Jane completes a *blazon* of his appearance and judges Mr. Rochester's body "good," as she will later judge herself "bad" in comparison to Blanche Ingram.

Significantly, the novel's attention to visuality and looking works on both dramatic and metanarrative levels. Jane looks at Rochester, and Rochester notices her looking: "You examine me, Miss Eyre," said he: "do you think me handsome?" (154; ch. 14). Through their mutual looking (or staring) and a series of conversations in which Rochester interrogates Jane, the two characters reiterate the negotiation of gender, power, and embodiment that occurs in the horse scene, further developing what is still an ambiguous relationship.

Screen versions of *Jane Eyre*, as we might expect, retain an emphasis on the physical aspects of this negotiation. All seem to recognize that this meeting—indoors, amid class formalities and the visible signs of Rochester's power, and following closely on the heels of a meeting outdoors in circumstances that released them from all such constraints—is crucial to establishing Jane and Rochester's power dynamics and sexual attraction, which are overdetermined by the resonances of class, gender, and (in this case, temporary) disability. Successive screen productions inflect this dynamic differently, establishing the characters' conversational and body language through acting and *mise-en-scène* (i.e., the compositional elements of characters, props, set, lighting, and camera orientation). As an aesthetic of *Jane Eyre* films as well as a broader ideology of the body, these scenes offer fascinating messages about geographies of power and disability as negotiated through such elements as looking/staring and levels.

I call these scenes "chair scenes" because only Amyes's interpretation preserves Brontë's presentation of Rochester in a chaise longue at this meeting; the others situate Jane and Rochester in chairs opposite each other,

convenient for the shot/reverse-shot sequences used (rather than the earlier two-shots binding them to one another) for their conversations. A highly charged dynamic, not only of talking but also looking, is thus created. The chair scenes illustrate the dynamics through which looking establishes relationships and hierarchies, a particularly loaded issue for films that represent blindness.<sup>11</sup> In Stevenson's production, acting, camera angles, and lighting make this looking unidirectional, a fact that has inspired debate among film critics.<sup>12</sup> The camera's function as an observer is evident in the cinematography. If Jane is not exactly *stared* at, the camera is certainly looking at her closely. The orientation of her face leaves a sense of the possibility of the viewer "catching her eye" as Rochester interrogates her or as she reacts to his harshness: we see her reactions. Further, as indicated through point-of-view shots and eyeline matches (i.e., shots edited together to connect one person's look with the object s/he regards), Stevenson's chair scene has Jane looking at Rochester (as she does in the novel).

Rochester, in contrast, is always looking to the side, away, or down; he directs questions at Jane or commands her, continually deflecting the viewer's attempts to understand his character. Chiaroscuro lighting, which leaves Jane's face fully lit and Rochester's dramatically shadowed, enhances his inaccessibility. In several screen versions, shots of Rochester place him in such deep profile within the back of the chair that neither Jane nor the audience has access to him. Acting and lighting thus reiterate Rochester as a man with many secrets, in opposition to Jane, a poor, plain, woman who lacks the ability to forestall the interrogative gaze of her employer.

Later film versions break Rochester's impenetrability to varying degrees. Lighting in the chair scenes still favors chiaroscuro,<sup>13</sup> with Jane frequently etherealized by backlighting. In terms of eye contact, however, Zeffirelli's and White's versions create particularly open Rochesters in Hurt's and Stephen's facial and eye orientations, using shot/countershot editing of character close-ups to produce a convincing sense of the dynamic interactions that build Jane and Rochester's attraction.

11. See Garland-Thomson for a useful discussion of the dynamics of eye contact (*Staring*, 40–41). Her scholarship on staring is particularly well attuned to film analysis, a discipline concerned with point of view, the gaze, and other aspects of visuality that inflect and are inflected by forms of embodied "difference," particularly gender difference. As I discuss later, Kleege and Cheu offer important discussions of eye contact, blindness, and "passing."

12. In brief, while Ellis and Kaplan argue that Jane's recurrent positioning as observer in the second part of the film makes her passive, Campbell and Soyung Lee criticize this conclusion as reductive and insufficiently nuanced in terms of film elements such as *mise-en-scène*.

13. The use of chiaroscuro is especially noticeable in the Zeffirelli interpretation because of the contrast it forms to the egalitarian, day-lit scene that precedes it.

Screen versions of this scene are particularly fascinating for the consistency with which they approach the central prop of the chair, and the fact that the scene often goes against conventions of frame composition and power. Rochester is established as an authority by sitting in his chair with others moving around him, or directing Jane to move her chair near to him; but he also places Jane in his chair at several points, which, given his identification with it, produces a sense of intimacy. By repeatedly shooting Rochester in his chair, cinematographers and directors collaborate to create a visual message that Rochester's chair defines him, suggesting that he is overshadowed by it, literally and figuratively. The shots may also suggest, metonymically, a wheelchair, implying the antiquated but nevertheless familiar notion of the chair user as "wheelchair-bound" or "confined" to a wheelchair. In their respective portrayals of Rochester, for instance, Cíarán Hinds (Young's version) and Toby Stephens (White's production) are distinctively slumped into and contained by their chairs in ways that suggest—along with the oblique framing of Rochester in these chair shots—a sense of Byronic mystery blended with stereotyped "angry-cripple" alienation, a foreshadowing not only of Rochester's later disability but also of the potential for his attractive brusqueness to slip into an available narrative of disability and masculinity.

At the same time, there is never any suggestion that Rochester's being in a chair and at a lower level than Jane places him in a position of dependency, supplication, or vulnerability. While conventions of film interpretation indicate that the upper two thirds of the frame are the locus of power and that actions tend to originate on the left side of the frame and be received by the right side, these conventions of visual design are always inflected in any scene by dialogue, plotting, acting, lighting, and other elements of cinema that are inextricably part of *mise-en-scène*.<sup>14</sup> Rochester is by definition on a lower plane than Jane in this scene; thus, conventionally, he has less visual power within the frame. Other than having Jane kneel before him—which she does in the Stevenson version, to pour hot water into a basin for Rochester's foot after he snaps his fingers toward the kettle—there is no way to inscribe their power differential via levels alone. While slight camera angles in shot/reverse-shots do suggest Rochester's dominant position in some versions, most films work instead with body language/orientation/framing, lighting, and acting to present his interrogation of Jane. Regardless of the approach, Rochester is always presented as the more powerful figure in this

14. Just as Third Cinema theory has forced film scholars to reconsider the conventions of Western film in terms of its unexamined limits, one wishes for a Crip Cinema theory that would investigate ways of overturning assumptions about levels, perspective, etc.

scene, despite being seated and disabled. White's version emphasizes this by shooting at the level of Rochester's chair, so that, rather than looking down at him and sharing Jane's point of view, we look from his orientation up at her. His position in the chair determines the norm for the conversation, just as his questions dictate the topics for discussion. A key visual message, then, is that being at a lower level, as in a chair of any kind, does not inherently situate a body as powerless.

## ROCHESTER DISABLED

While nineteenth-century novels can be notably ambiguous about some conditions of the body—not only pregnancy but also illness and disability—Brontë's description of Rochester after the fire that destroys Thornfield Hall is frank and direct: “one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr. Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly” (494; ch. 36). Brontë is also very clear about each character's uncertainty as they approach the delicate negotiation of their new relationship. In this reunion scene, after observing Rochester unnoticed, Jane takes the place of a servant, replaying in miniature his cruelty to her during her governess days by not identifying herself to him immediately. The masquerade ends in Rochester's exclamation and a passionate embrace:

He groped; I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine.

[ . . . ] The muscular hand broke from my custody; my arm was seized, my shoulder, neck, waist—I was entwined and gathered to him. (500; ch. 37)<sup>15</sup>

When Jane kisses Rochester, the encounter becomes more complex: “I pressed my lips to his once brilliant and now rayless eyes—I swept his hair from his brow, and kissed that too. He suddenly seemed to arouse himself: the conviction of the reality of all this seized him” (501; ch. 37). Rochester becomes anxious about the nature of Jane's interest in him: “But as you are rich, Jane, you have now, no doubt, friends who will look after you, and not suffer you to devote yourself to a blind lameter like me?” (501; ch. 37).

15. See Bolt for an analysis of this moment's participation of “the motif of the groping blindman” and associations with lecherousness (272–73). The Young production improbably shifts Rochester's groping to the water glass. In several versions, Jane needs to guide the water to his lips despite the fact that he has clearly learned mobility techniques and would be unlikely to require so much assistance with an activity as daily as drinking from a glass.

For her part, Jane, even empowered by her gains in status, is also hesitant to assume that he wants her: “I suddenly remembered that I might have been all wrong, and was perhaps playing the fool unwittingly; and I began gently to withdraw myself from his arms” (502; ch. 37). While the pair does not completely settle their situation in this scene, they have found a level of comfort with each other’s feelings that permits a frank and loving discussion of Rochester’s changed body:

“On this arm, I have neither hand nor nails,” he said, drawing the mutilated limb from his breast, and showing it to me. “It is a mere stump—a ghastly sight! Don’t you think so, Jane?”

“It is a pity to see it; and a pity to see your eyes—and the scar of fire on your forehead: and the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this; and making too much of you.”

“I thought you would be revolted, Jane, when you saw my arm, and my cicatrised visage.” (503; ch. 37)

In this startling scene of physical revelation, Brontë does little to develop the details of what the stump or scar look like; the reader is given no basis on which to evaluate whether s/he might find it a ghastly or revolting sight, and Jane’s quick answer offers no suggestions of her reactions beyond the statement that “it is a pity” (which is not the same as saying that she pities him). Rochester’s simply described action of “drawing the mutilated limb from his breast and showing it” is similarly undramatic, particularly in terms of the *melodramatic* conventions that in Brontë’s time, and ours, tend to dominate cultural scripts of disability, particularly first revelations of disablement. As familiar as we may be with the ending of *Jane Eyre*, we may overlook—as many critics have—this progressive conversation about a changed body and about a relationship that is partly changed as well, but for the better.

Viewed symbolically, Rochester’s disabilities have posed a continuing challenge for feminist critics. Helene Moglen sees his injuries as the necessary complement to Jane’s independence, “the terrible condition of a relationship of equality” (142). Gilbert and Gubar argue for a symbolic interpretation beyond that of castration: “Apparently mutilated, he is paradoxically stronger [ . . . ]. [N]ow, being equals, he and Jane can afford to depend upon each other with no fear of one exploiting the other” (368–9). What is problematic about this emphasis is that it reads disability as purely symbolic, a critical gesture that simply tries to recuperate castration into the creation of metaphysical sight and strength. David Bolt’s “The Blindman in the Classic: Feminisms, Ocularcentrism, and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*”

is a welcome exception to mainstream critical reading of Rochester's disabilities. But, arguing from a disability studies perspective, Bolt nevertheless believes that the resolution between Jane and Rochester reinforces blindness as deficiency and loss, as an emptiness that fills out the desires of the sighted Jane. One implication seems to be that the marriage that ensues is not about the body or sexuality; according to these interpretations, Jane and Rochester have found their egalitarian union away from society but also away from the embodiment that is central to the novel.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, we can also read Rochester as resistant to Jane's encompassing narrative of his blindness: he shows her his stump, after all, and he tells her, "I want a wife" (512; ch. 37). He does not go gently into the good night of being a blind projection. In fact, Rodas suggests that we might read this moment as defiantly phallic: "What if [ . . . ] Rochester's disability is a beautiful thing within the Jane-Rochester sexual aesthetic, his stump manifestly, unapologetically erect, phallic, masculine?" (e-mail message to author, June 10, 2010). Rodas's reading suggests that we might consider this scene, and particularly the revelation of the stump, in terms of Robert McRuer's concept of "a critically queer and disabled" perspective, in which the gap between normative and queer sexualities—and normative and disabled bodies—is mobilized to reimagine and reshape "the limited forms of embodiment and desire proffered by the systems that would contain us all" (96). In other words, in this moment in the novel, Brontë powerfully enacts a disabled character refusing both normalization and marginalization: the "staree" (Garland-Thomson's term) wrests control of the scene of looking.

As with Rochester's fall from his horse and the various chair scenes, screen productions likewise continue to interpret and critique this reunion of the lovers in which one character is a blind amputee. Informed by the relentless emphasis on conventional beauty and a superficial and artificial sense of wholeness that characterizes the narratives of popular media, cultural ambivalence regarding disability is nowhere more evident than in the ways that filmmakers render the close of Brontë's novel. More changes seem to occur in screen interpretations of Jane's return to Rochester than in any other part of the novel. While these scenes, like the earlier ones, share touch-

16. Gilbert's later essay on "furious lovemaking" in *Jane Eyre* corrects that suggestion, noting Jane's return to the observations about his body that mark her first meeting with him and expressed desire to kiss not simply his brow but also his lips. "There can be no question, then, that what Jane calls the 'pleasure in my services' both she and Rochester experience in their utopian woodland is a pleasure in physical as well as spiritual intimacy, erotic as well as intellectual communion" (368).

points, there is substantially more variation in added dialogue (and added affect), as well as in the ways in which disability is represented as a physical, psychological, and social experience.

Jane's return to Rochester is fraught with increasingly mixed feelings as she apprehends the ruin of Thornfield Hall and the situation of her former master and fiancé. The return is also complex for the film audience, which has had many opportunities to become closely identified or *sutured* with Jane but not with Rochester. In Stevenson's rendition, by the time we enter the ruin (where this film relocates the reunion), we have looked at Jane and looked with Jane at Rochester, but we have been to a large extent prevented by the cinematography from ever *seeing into* him—having the illusion of access to his actual thoughts or feelings—because of Welles's acting, the *mise-en-scène* that takes the place of close-ups, and the chiaroscuro lighting that leaves him enigmatically in the dark and Jane in the light, vulnerable to view.

As with the chair scenes, certain filmic conventions have evolved for this moment of “seeing blindness,” based loosely on the end of the novel.<sup>17</sup> Some versions develop this “seeing” gradually. Both Aymes and White render the first sight of Rochester outside Ferndean with some illuminating differences. Aymes's Rochester, for example, not only gropes his way out and back into the house but is also guided by a servant who holds him by the arm. White's Rochester, in contrast, has a cane he uses to navigate his own way outside and back into the house. This initial scene, in which Jane does not speak to Rochester, is followed by a second one in which she enters the room in the place of a servant, bringing him water. As we enter the room, sutured to Jane's point of view, we are guided by shot sequences to look at Rochester's blindness (and to look at Jane looking at blindness).

Young's version is particularly dramatic in its rendering of numerous close-ups of Rochester's face and in the special effects makeup that represents his blindness. Here the cinematic language of the earlier parts of the productions provides meaning through repetition with a difference: whereas in earlier scenes Rochester was guarded, three-quarter-turned, or in shadow, the post-disablement scenes offer up Rochester's face and body in full light to shots from Jane's point of view. Where before he looked at Jane but was inaccessible himself, the post-blinding shots make him vulnerable to our scrutiny and, following the conventions of cinematic representations of

17. The moment in which blindness or another disability is “seen” or materialized by another person (often the beloved) recurs in many narrative forms, as does the scene of vision's return in “cure” narratives. For an excellent study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scenes of returning vision in historical context, see Paulson.



blindness, unaware of our voyeuristic invasion. Some shots are even identical in framing to earlier ones. Jane's reaction shots establish her ability to look directly at him in a way that controls the gaze, unlike the earlier scenes in which she was in essence a face on display to his interrogation.

A return to disability studies theories of blindness and looking is helpful as we engage this scene. In particular, a recent essay by Johnson Cheu might be repurposed to examine cinema's use of blindness. Drawing on the work of Georgina Kleege, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and other disability studies scholars, Cheu's "Seeing Blindness on Screen" focuses on "the blind female gaze," exploring "blindness" and a distinctive "blind gaze" as an element filmmakers co-opt to shore up the power of the "normative" (male) gaze. Cheu points out that feminist film theory, though it has observed this feature, has not yet fully interrogated its meaning.<sup>18</sup> In this essay, Cheu indirectly reaffirms the possibility of reading Jane's reunion with Rochester as a scene in which she retrospectively establishes her own sense of equity in her relationship with him. Put another way, the scenario Cheu analyzes—that of sighted characters and moviegoers looking at the blind gaze of female characters—is significantly complicated by *Jane Eyre* and by this scene (see figure 1) of a sighted female character regarding a male character's "blind gaze."

Jane has repeatedly narrated her lack of object-status because she is plain, poor, and small; her descriptions of Rochester have objectified him, making her a surprisingly confident *looking* subject, if not one confident in her authority to desire a man who is her class superior. Later, however, she must acknowledge that she is, for him, an object of desire, as much as he is an object for her evaluation—a situation that enables her power of refusal. Finally, when she returns a rich woman and encounters Rochester after his disablement, we see Rochester as an object of interest, concern, and longing before he himself is aware of the gaze we share with Jane. Once alerted to her presence, Rochester again sees himself as an object for her evaluation, but with the additional concern of disability as a complication. Further, he is no longer a man with secrets he can—and believes he must—withhold from her. The cinematography of this scene reinforces Jane's new ownership of the look and the concurrent shift in power.

As before, levels are central to the figurative and literal dynamic between Jane and Rochester. The change in elevation (raising Jane up and bringing Rochester low) that so many critics observe in the novel is literal here. Jane

18. See Mulvey, DeLauretis, and Doane for key theoretical works on gender and the filmic gaze.



FIGURE 1. Jane's first view of Rochester blinded, with dog Pilot and cane, in the ruins of Thornfield Hall. Orson Welles stars in the 1944 film directed by Robert Stevenson. 20th Century Fox/The Kobal Collection/Art Resource.

enters a room in which Rochester is slumped in a chair, reminiscent of her first “official” meeting with him at Thornfield in which he is temporarily disabled. However, this is repetition with a difference: rather than a sprained ankle, he is blind and otherwise disabled (the “otherwise” indicated by a cane, a general appearance of fatigue, burn/cicatrix makeup, or, very rarely, signs of amputation). If in the earlier scene Rochester ignores Jane’s entry because she is a governess and beneath his notice until he finds her interesting, in this one he doesn’t notice her because he is incapable of noticing (the film would have us imagine that his blindness is an all-encompassing lack of awareness), and even when he is aware that someone is there, he does not know who it is until she speaks. Further, as Jane and Rochester interact, the literal changes in their levels break out of the repetitive framing; there are a number of shots (in several screen interpretations) that truncate Rochester to privilege the audience’s view of Jane. Acting and directing exacerbate the message of disability as dependency in Young’s version, while increasing the voyeuristic sense of staring at blindness; although the audience will later see Rochester grope Jane, in this scene Rochester gropes and fumbles for his water glass while the camera watches.

The visual economy of film thus reiterates Brontë’s explicit visual empowerment of Jane, whose problematic aspects Bolt analyzes so effectively. In fact, the frequent repetition of earlier visual motifs, done with no apparent critical distance, reiterates what Bolt points out as one of the disappointing aspects of the novel, the message that “the misery of the blind-man is integral to the happiness of not only the sighted woman, but also the sighted man whom Rochester becomes” (285).

Scripts for screen narratives of *Jane Eyre* suggest that misery alone is insufficient, and that twentieth- and twenty-first century interpretations of the novel must carry the freight of contemporary fixations about disabled masculinity: they must engage angrily with the assumption of pity. In Stevenson’s very compressed version of the ending of Brontë’s novel, Jane sees Rochester walking in the ruined part of Thornfield with the dog Pilot and a cane. Where Pilot, earlier in the plot, works as an extension of Rochester’s masculinity and class power, here the dog is repurposed as a different kind of prosthesis. The dog and cane read as two assistive devices that overdetermine, as visual metonyms, the message of his disablement, without transcribing Brontë’s descriptions of Rochester’s amputation and blindness. Welles performs blindness with one eye opened to reveal more white than the other, and with the “zombielike stare” Kleege notes as a convention of cinematic representations of blindness (45). Jane works no deception in this production; Rochester simply detects Jane’s presence and shouts at her; she

identifies herself; he touches her; and they resolve their situation in a brief conversation and an embrace. But as brief as the scene is, it has time for this conversation:

“Jane—all you can feel now is mere pity. I don’t want your pity.”

“Edward.”

“You can’t spend your life with a mere wreckage of a man. You’re young and fresh. You ought to get married.”

“Don’t send me away. Please don’t send me away!”

“Do you think I want to let you go?”

A passionate clinch closes the scene, followed by a summary ending and the closing credits. Compression is the principle guiding the production, but curiously, in compressing the much longer scenes in the novel, screenwriters tend to use “pity” as shorthand for the much more complicated emotional dynamic offered by Brontë.

Moreover, Stevenson’s early cinematic adaptation is not especially dated in its popular representation of blind masculinity. Nearly forty years later, Amyes’s production, “faithful” in other ways, includes an angry Rochester who retorts that as a rich woman, Jane has “friends enough who will not suffer you to devote yourself to a lame blind wreck. This is pity, not love. Leave me!” Young’s interpretation makes a very similar move within a much more elaborate development of Jane and Rochester’s reunion. The words *companion* and *nurse* trigger the following, a clear departure from Brontë’s text: “I don’t want a companion! Neither do I want a nurse.” He continues, “I might have known—so you have come back to take pity on a poor blind man. Is that it? Who told you?” Similarly, where Brontë includes a discussion of Rochester’s “hideousness” as a moment in which he feels out Jane’s attitude towards him and she responds with a humor that indicates she is unwilling to simply soothe his anxiety, the Young production’s script generates an angrily bitter Rochester who snarls, “Take a good look. It was a narrow escape. You could have been married to this hideous blind wreck,” and responds to Jane’s assurances of love with, “How can you love me like this? Do not speak these words out of pity.” Several screen interpretations of the meeting between Jane and Rochester, then, find it necessary to supplement the novel with scripts that depict him as resolutely angry and focused on pity and shame.

The Zeffirelli and White versions stand out for actively working to render the closing scenes in ways that invite viewers to think beyond these received cultural assumptions that disability is the occasion for anger and

pity but not sexuality. Zeffirelli's version exemplifies the power of *mise-en-scène* to convey relationships far more effectively than added dialogue (particularly when the dialogue delivers a complex interaction in reductive terms). The resolution is compressed, like most things in this production: The two reencounter each other; Jane avows that she will never leave Rochester; they kiss; he laments his "ruined" state; she denies it; and they embrace again. The next scene provides an excerpt from the novel's epilogue. Jane and Rochester's development of a new configuration for their relationship, however, is something lighting and camera work communicate in significant and effective ways. She finds him in a room with low vaulted ceilings where shafts of sunlight from arched, churchlike windows counteract the room's central darkness and cryptlike tone. Chiaroscuro externalizes Rochester's emotional liminality, but the sunlight combined with the low ceilings presents the space more as attic than crypt, suggesting that he is now contained by Thornfield, as Bertha was before. A series of two-shots position the pair together but alternate whose face is at eye-level (whether sitting or standing) and, indeed, who sits or kneels or stands. Zeffirelli follows the convention of Rochester standing up as he voices concerns about Jane's plan to be his companion and nurse (the word *nurse* usually generates the movement), but his rise to his feet does not seem to signal anger about pity but rather a sadness for his changed self that is quickly dispelled by Jane's rebuttals about vigor. The scene closes with a tableau of them embracing under the curve of the vaulted ceiling. If other aspects of the film have been accused of muting Brontë's gender-egalitarian vision, its cinematography of bodies and relationships conveys a strong message of equal potential for self-determination, regardless of gender or dis/ability.

The visual eloquence of the scene is undisturbed by Whitemore and Zeffirelli's script. When Jane avows that she will never leave Rochester again, he says, "So you will stay with me. How?" This is neither reproach nor suspicion, but a crucial question that both need to answer. The quickness with which it is resolved may not be fully plausible, but it is much less troubling than the compulsion to add in pity and anger.

White's version handles the reunion in a much more extended form, separating Jane's first view of ruined Thornfield from her encounter with Rochester, as the novel does, and giving her an opportunity to learn of the fire (but not Rochester's disabilities) before seeking him out at Ferndean. It thus honors the novel's extended reestablishment of Jane and Rochester's relationship and the issue of "how" they will relate with their changed circumstances. While it shares with other films some visual conventions of

blindness as incapacity, this version is striking for its overturning of the message that disabled people are not sexual subjects.

We enter the room in which Rochester is engulfed, through chiaroscuro, in darkness, his white shirt and the white bandages that wrap one hand standing out from his figure slumped in a chair. Jane actually pours the drink into his mouth; as in Young's version, White dramatizes blindness as groping not simply for Jane's body but for everything—despite Rochester's effective use of the cane in the outdoor shot. Following this moment, however, there are no angry outbursts or discussions of pity. Jane and Rochester embrace; he weeps, and then “feels her up”—but rather than leave this single anchor to the “groping” language of the novel, Sandy Welch's screenplay normalizes the groping by following it with other moments of sexual mutuality in the film's closing scenes, mirroring those before the failed wedding. Jane not only sits in his lap (an action she takes, and takes time to justify, in the novel) but lies on top of him on a riverbank. While the propriety of the nineteenth-century novel, already strained by Brontë, would draw the line at such representations, their inclusion in film interpretations creates a powerful statement that is arguably in the novel as well: Rochester blinded and amputated is no less sexual a being than he was before the fire, and Jane is no less desiring of him. The film ends with a horizontal two-shot and a horizontal pan that moves across their intertwining feet (cinematic shorthand for sexual intercourse) as Jane lies on top of Rochester.

A distinctive feature of screen versions is how they work with Brontë's very clearly articulated directions about Rochester's amputation. In almost every version, Rochester's blindness and the scarring on his face are suggested somehow through props and special-effects makeup. While Orson Welles seems simply to widen one eye, Ciáran Hinds wears an opaque contact lens; Stephens seems simply to have burn makeup, and the burn makeup worn by Timothy Dalton's and William Hurt's Rochesters suggests that the left eyelid in each instance has fused over the eye socket to the left cheek. In almost every version, however, both of Rochester's hands are completely or virtually intact. In Young's production, Hinds's left hand has some burn makeup; in White's interpretation, Stephens's left hand is bandaged; but only in Amyes's version is Rochester actually given a visible amputation, albeit virtually indistinguishable from the cuff of his shirt.

In this context, it is striking not so much that some versions ignore major plot elements—after all, adaptation is usually a craft of compression—but that some of the most “faithful” versions have moments in which they completely depart from the novel, suggesting that while Brontë had no difficulty imagining Jane desiring Rochester just as much (or more) with an amputa-

tion, twentieth- and twenty-first century film is less convinced of the marketability of such a narrative. This is particularly interesting in terms of White's BBC interpretation, which otherwise may provide the most normalizing approach to disability and desire by making Jane and Rochester's relationship at the end as sexualized as it is in the middle. All the same, whether it's because an amputation is a deal-breaker and blindness isn't—or because an amputation presents more involved “cure” sequences than regained sight—White's sexual Rochester is still only a blinded Rochester.

Taken in the aggregate, popular film versions of *Jane Eyre* consistently articulate—as does Brontë's novel—desire in the context of blindness. At the same time, however, anger and pity are almost always presented as obligatory gatekeepers to the happy ending, which is not the case in Brontë's novel. Further, films rarely visually represent Rochester's amputation, suggesting that a blind Rochester can be desiring and desirable, but that a blind amputee as desirable is more than filmmakers currently expect of their audiences. Whether it is the queerness of the amputation—itself a potentially hyperphallic symbol—that makes it alarming, or the extra layer of perceived “dependence” it may imply, a handless Rochester remains absent from *Jane Eyre* films.<sup>19</sup>

These concerns notwithstanding, film has much to contribute to our visually oriented concept of interpersonal relations, where eye contact dominates. In the scenes of Jane's reunion with Rochester, proxemics and shot length are almost as important as eye contact to establish point of view and, furthermore, to suggest that point of view is not restricted to being able to view things with the eyes. In Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre*, for example, the camera lingers at the level of the seated, blinded Rochester, establishing his orientation to the world as the norm. The work done by the earlier “chair scenes,” which counter conventions of *mise-en-scène* and power, persists in these more explicitly disability-focused scenes and prevent us from assuming that the seated person is automatically diminished and dependent. Jane is out of the frame when they embrace but is not “looked up to” as some distant and longed-for ideal. Indeed, Rochester does not look up at Jane at all but rather is present and close to the viewer, with intimacy created not simply through faciality but also through embodiment. While some productions (Young's, in particular) pause on the standing embrace between the two, lingering on Jane's face and reactions as central to the shot, in Zeffirelli's film, Rochester

19. The dearth of film stills that show Rochester visibly disabled is significant. While film versions rarely picture his disabilities in any detail, the archives of publicity stills seem to enact a further erasure of meaningful renderings of disability from the public and popular narrative of *Jane Eyre*.



and Jane alternate being present in the frame as a body and being present as a face. Soyoung Lee's description of the scene is apt:

The depiction of Rochester and Jane's emerging [*sic*] into each other is not effected through a seamless fusion, but a montage of images, differently framed and from different angles, signifying their multiple positions and [the] complex dynamics which are involved in their negotiating of the[m] selves in marriage. (302)

This visual medium, then, actually argues for the value of tactility, instructing sighted audiences that you don't have to see to have a presence or a perspective, or to have your point of view central to an important human moment.<sup>20</sup>

Key feminist readings of *Jane Eyre* films criticize productions which remove Jane's opportunities for individuation by softening the domineering

20. This visual focus on embodiment and tactility distinguishes the Jane-Rochester re-union embrace in Cary Fukunaga's 2011 film as well. Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*, perhaps more than any other popular screen version, shows us how film and poetry function similarly. Its muted palette and meticulously detailed sets evoke a nearly visceral progression of moods that respect the blend of depression and passion that distinguishes much of Brontë's fiction. The socially insightful *mise-en-scène* (recurrent point-of-view shots that show Jane's ambiguous position of governess enmeshed in, but not truly part of, the upper-class society she serves) combined with painterly lighting that recalls the Baroque paintings of Georges de la Tour (and, in that mode, Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête*) generate this distinctive tone. With emotional landscape its priority, it makes sense that Fukunaga takes the necessary compression of the novel to an extreme: a combination of compression and discontinuity—in which various connectives are stripped away—make the film function much as a poem does, moving from resonant image to resonant image without explanation. For example, instead of a gradual approach to the ruins of Thornfield Hall—a device other versions use as a transition to Rochester's disablement—Fukunaga heightens the impact of Jane's first view. In this film, Rochester's disability is signaled by his immobility (an echo of the chair scene) and a close-up on his face that reveals alteration and lack of focus in his eyes, probably a combination of special effects contact lenses and acting. In addition, his hair is particularly long and shaggy; as my colleague Ann Fox commented, "he looks like a war veteran." In fact, Rochester echoes, for those of us old enough to remember this important contribution to disability consciousness and culture, Jon Voight in *Coming Home*. The hair is also a nod to Jane's observations in the novel about his "thick and uncut locks" and need for rehumanizing: "your hair reminds me of eagles' feathers; whether your nails are grown like birds' claws or not, I have not yet noticed" (ch. 37). While in the novel, however, Jane's comment provides the opening for Rochester to reveal his amputation, the 2011 film, like most of the others, leaves both of his hands intact. What is particularly lost in the Fukunaga film's resolution—and perhaps most distinctive about it—is any negotiation between Rochester and Jane about the meaning of his changed bodily state for their relationship. It is even briefer in its resolution than the Orson Welles version. One might argue that in Fukunaga's vision of Rochester and Jane's relationship, the conversation about disability and marriage—will Jane be a nurse or a wife?—is vestigial, an unnecessary and outdated obstacle to the superseding "moment of being" of their union. This viewer, however, missed it.



aspects of Rochester that spur her development, and/or by actually cutting the scenes in which Jane individuates in her time away from Thornfield.<sup>21</sup> These readings also evaluate the rendering of disability as a key element in Brontë's argument about female individuation and egalitarian marriage, building on literary criticism that looks at Rochester's disabilities as judgments—if not punishments—Brontë enacts (along with Jane's inheritance) to resolve Jane and Rochester's power disparities. For many critics, disability as total dependency sums up its function in the novel. Patsy Stoneman's summary of several feminist critics' objections to a perceived "dilution of Jane's rebellious spirit" (Ellis and Kaplan, 192) in most film versions reaffirms that critics see Rochester's disability as inversely related to Jane's independence: "Rochester is not sufficiently injured to need Jane's assistance [ . . . ]. In the fire, Rochester is not scarred and does not lose a hand, *which means that the promise of restored sight brings him back to his original strength*" (23; emphasis added). Sumiko Higashi's essay on the way film versions of *Jane Eyre* capitulate to the market forces of the Hollywood romance argues that the representation of disability in *Jane Eyre* films fails to render convincingly what she sees as the novel's message, that Rochester is "totally dependent" on Jane (22). Higashi appears to criticize Welles's Rochester for being either not disabled enough or too sexual to be disabled; for example, "he claims her with a passionate kiss placed squarely on the mouth. Rather good aim for a blind man" (23). Similarly, Soyoung Lee's nuanced discussion of three film versions of *Jane Eyre* and their use of cinematic techniques to portray gendered power dynamics, nevertheless criticizes Stevenson's film because it represents the disabled Rochester as high-functioning and sexual: "The ruins are an obvious symbolism of Rochester's state, however, his posture is still as vigorous as before: his right hand is intact and although blind, he does not falter a bit," "his masculinity [is] intact" (287–88). What is striking about most such criticism is not only that it tends to fault films that reduce Rochester's disablement but also that the theory emerging from this stance requires us to understand disability as an icon of dependency and asexuality.

Rochester's undiminished and *unchastened* disablement in Stevenson's film is a primary criticism of Kate Ellis and E. Ann Kaplan's much-cited feminist analysis. Orson Welles's nondisabled Rochester "always dominates whatever scene he is in," and the camera repeatedly situates Jane as an observer of Rochester, a position they posit as being passive (196). Specifically, Ellis and Kaplan criticize the ending's failure to demonstrate

21. See Ellis and Kaplan; Higashi.

that Rochester has received his comeuppance through disablement: “Welles limps through the ruins but is hardly the mellowed, chastened Rochester (could Welles ever appear chastened?) of Brontë’s closing chapters. Their coming together simply represents the typical lovers’ reunion, with male and female traditionally placed” (198). In other words, Rochester is neither dependent nor diminished enough to resolve the imbalance between him and Jane, though disability was apparently supposed to enact these changes.

In short, those film analyses of *Jane Eyre* that address disability extend and reinforce what the films themselves often tell us about common assumptions regarding disability. These constructions of disability are focused entirely on dependency, without consideration of other functions, and they seem to assume, along with Helene Moglen, that disability means the end of sexuality: “Jane’s development [can] be maintained only at the cost of Rochester’s romantic self-image. [ . . . ] It is not a lover he requires, but a mother [ . . . ]. And it is this function which Jane will gratefully assume” (142–43).<sup>22</sup>

Along with these shortcomings, film critics’ interpretations of Rochester’s disabilities tend to focus on a limited vocabulary of film effects, and thus to read reductively. Indeed, most film criticism, regardless of subject, does not consider disability as a key element in plot, characterization, dialogue, *mise-en-scène*, or other important elements of cinematic meaning. As such, critics are prone to elide what is most worth discussing in film versions of *Jane Eyre*: the way each thinks through longstanding cultural narratives of disability and sexuality. Communicating in a primarily visual medium, these films ultimately invite us to reconsider desire, as well as human presence and identity, within a broader aesthetic than that defined by conventional faces, ordinary vision, and upright posture.

22. Moglen, like many other critics, looks at the ending of *Jane Eyre* as parallel to the role Brontë assumed in relation to her father, Patrick Brontë, who had cataracts.