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Defying Patriarchal Oppression in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Susanna White's Film Adaptation

Charlotte Brontë'nin *Jane Eyre* Romanında ve Susanna White'ın Film Uyarlamasında Ataerkil Baskıya Meydan Okunması

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Abstract

Patriarchy has sought to subjugate women and consolidate male supremacy throughout history. Unfortunately, the systematic oppression of women also prevailed in the Victorian era. *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, one of the masterpieces of the Victorian novel, not only displays but also challenges the patriarchal oppression of the Victorian era. Likewise, Jane Eyre (2006), one of the recent film adaptations of Brontë's novel directed by Susanna White, successfully questions the subordination of women in that era while employing diverse narrative techniques. This study primarily investigates the factors contributing to the oppression of Victorian women, such as gender roles, objectification, sexualisation, clothing, and the male gaze, by drawing on the work of several feminist critics. It also analyses how the novel and the adaptation challenge patriarchal oppression. Furthermore, the study discusses how the nonconformist protagonist Jane Eyre functions to defy the patriarchal norms in these works. The study highlights that both the dominated order by emancipating the protagonist from being a subordinated woman in Victorian society.

Keywords: Jane Eyre, Film Adaptation, Victorian Women, Patriarchal Oppression

Öz

Patriyarka kadınları tarih boyunca boyunduruk altına almaya ve erkek üstünlüğünü pekiştirmeye çalışmıştır. Ne yazık ki, kadınların sistematik bir baskı altında tutulmasına Viktorya döneminde de devam edilmiştir. Viktorya dönemi romanının başyapıtlarından biri olan Charlotte Brontë'nin *Jane Eyre* (1847) adlı romanı, Viktorya dönemindeki patriyarkal baskıyı sergilemekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda bu baskıya meydan okur. Benzer şekilde, Brontë'nin romanının son dönem sinema uyarlamalarından biri olan, Susannah White'ın yönettiği Jane Eyre (2006), farklı anlatı teknikleri aracılığıyla o dönemdeki kadınların ikincilleştirilmiş koşullarını başarılı bir şekilde sorgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma temel olarak toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, kadınların nesneleştirilmesi ve cinselleştirilmesi, kıyafetler ve eril bakış gibi kadınların ikincilleştirilmesine yol açan faktörleri çeşitli feminist eleştirmenlere atıfta bulunarak sorgulamakta, romanın ve film uyarlamasının Viktorya dönemi kadınlarının baskı altında tutulmasına nasıl meydan okuduğunu incelemektedir. Çalışma daha sonra, bu eserlerdeki nonkonformist başkahraman Jane Eyre'in patriyarkal normlara nasıl karşı çıktığını tartışmaktadır. Bu çalışma hem romanın hem de film uyarlamasının, başkahramanı Viktorya dönemi toplumunda ikincil plana atılmış bir kadın olmaktan kurtararak erkek egemen düzenin dayatmalarını altüst ettiğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jane Eyre, Film Uyarlaması, Viktorya Dönemi Kadınları, Patriyarkal Baskı

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Introduction

The Victorian era can be regarded as a period in which much upheaval occurred as a result of several incidents, such as the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and scientific developments. and the colonial expansion of the British Empire. While the bourgeoisie benefited from the social, economic, and scientific developments, the majority of the people in that era suffered from these changes since they led to inequality and injustice in society. As Charles Dickens (1993) subtly explains in *A Tale of Two Cities,* it was the era of contradictions harbouring "the season of Light" and "the season of Darkness" concurrently (p. 3). Unfortunately, Victorian women, like the majority, could not benefit from "the season of Light" but confronted "the season of Darkness" due to the double standards prescribed for them. Emphasising women's limited educational and professional opportunities during the Victorian era and their curbed rights for voting, owning a property, and divorcing, Stephen Greenblatt (2006) puts forward that "England has done much to extend its citizens' liberties, but women did not share in these freedoms" (pp. 990-991). The reason for such inequality cannot be explained by focusing on the biological differences between men and women or socio-economic dynamics; it primarily lies in the patriarchal ideology.

Adrianne Rich (1986) defines patriarchal ideology as "the power of fathers: a familial-social system in which men by force, direct pressure, or through rituals, tradition, law, and the language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labor, determine what women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is subsumed under the male" (p. 86). Her definition makes it clear that women are forced to become subordinated individuals in society through a patriarchal framework in cooperation with several other instruments in every corner of society.

The patriarchal framework defines and reproduces specific social roles for men and women. Nonetheless, as Simone de Beauvoir (1949) states, the patriarchal system attempts to reinforce these roles by manipulating biological facts about the difference between males and females. For instance, the superiority of men's muscular strength is conceptually broadened through cultural and political practices, and women are redefined as submissive and dependent beings through the patriarchal ideology. The assigned roles are, indeed, not innate, and several feminist thinkers, such as Kate Millett (1971) and Simone de Beauvoir (1949), highlight the need for interrogating these taken-for-granted roles (pp. 28-29; p. 18). As a result of questioning these social roles, Judith Butler (1989) reconceptualises them under the umbrella term called gender. She defines it as "a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (p.520). Butler clarifies that the gender roles prescribed by the patriarchal order are "constructed," and she defies the patriarchal presumptions based on the biological differences between the two sexes.

Gender roles, assigned by the patriarchal system, also became evident during the Victorian era. As Linda M. Shires (1992) says, "gender assumed a new importance" due to the multifaceted changes and developments, ranging from the Industrial Revolution to political implementations (p. 149). Specific qualities, such as being submissive, dependent, and passive, along with conventional roles, such as motherhood and housewifery, were associated with femininity; they were exalted during the Victorian era (Kent, 1999, pp. 179-180). In other words, femininity or womanhood was equated to being self-sacrificing. This formulation was attempted to be generalised and presented as the innate traits of women; however, as John Stuart Mill (1988) revolutionarily detected long before several feminist critics, what was called "the nature of woman" in the Victorian era was "an artificial thing" and it was "the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others" (p. 38). Victorian novelists, such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Thomas Hardy, were also conscious of this artificiality. They not only displayed the permeative nature of patriarchal oppression in their works but also voiced "woman's struggle for self-realisation in the context of the constraints imposed on her" (Stephen Greenblatt, 2006, p. 995). Likewise, as a prominent novelist of the era, Charlotte Brontë elucidated the suffering of the Victorians in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and questioned the constraints that subordinate women through her rebellious heroine Jane.

This study, accordingly, seeks to delve into the factors that reinforce patriarchal oppression, such as gender roles, objectification, sexualisation, clothing, and the male gaze, in Brontë*'s* novel and Susannah White's film adaptation in light of feminist criticism. The study firstly scrutinises how Brontë subverts patriarchal oppression through her self-confident and nonconformist protagonist, Jane Eyre. Moreover, it examines how the film adaptation frees the protagonist from being a subordinated woman as successfully as the novel through wittily created images and scenes despite the limited screen time. Finally, the study explores how both the novel and the film adaptation challenge the patriarchal norms of the Victorian era.

Interrogating Patriarchal Oppression in the Novel

The protagonist, Jane Eyre, differs from the stereotypical docile feminine figures of the Victorian era with her unruly spirit. She is depicted not only "as a strong woman character shifting the class barriers" (Erdem Ayyıldız, 2017, p. 147), but also as a woman defying gendered feminine roles deemed suitable by the patriarchal order throughout the novel. As Kate Ellis and E. Ann Kaplan (1981) state, Jane struggles with "the constrictions and inequalities of the patriarchal spaces within which she

is placed: Gateshead, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, and finally Marsh End" (p. 84). Despite such restrictions, Jane strives for independence at the cost of even social exclusion in every phase of her life, including her childhood.

As an orphan, she suffers from the cruel and marginalising attitude of her aunt, Mrs Reed, and her naughty cousins, including John Reed, in Gateshead Hall. She becomes the other who lacks parental love there. Nonetheless, considering the fact that family is quite an instrumental tool in shaping and controlling women, Jane's lack of familial ties allows her to avoid adopting a conventional feminine role. As Terry Eagleton (2005) notes, her orphan status leads her to "solitude" but also offers her "freedom" (p. 25). Furthermore, the constraints she faces as "a female outsider" enable her to "view herself . . . as a single individual" (Avril, 2005, p. 135). Accordingly, Jane turns her disadvantage into an advantage in her journey to independence and autonomy as a woman. Although her nonconformist nature is attempted to be suspended, this renders Jane a woman rejecting gendered feminine roles exalted in Victorian society.

In Gateshead Hall, as Jane herself indicates, she is "a discord" and has "nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed and her children" (Brontë, 1992, p. 10). She is verbally and physically bullied by John Reed, her orphan status is repeatedly emphasised to her several times, and she is locked in the red room, which traumatises her, by Mrs Reed since she does not comply with the submissive feminine role. Although such mistreatments devastate her childhood, her hatred towards her aunt and cousins provides her with a third space or freer identity outside the Victorian restrictions.

Jane's social isolation does not end at Lowood Orphanage, and coercive restrictions follow her in this boarding school, too. As Elaine Showalter (1977) indicates, as an institution, "Lowood disciplines its inmates by attempting to destroy their individuality at the same time that it punishes and starves their sexuality" (p. 117). The orphaned girls are made to live in appalling conditions and are forced to adopt submissive feminine roles similar to Jane who was previously locked in the red room. Most importantly, their sexuality is attempted to be repressed, particularly by a patriarchal figure, Mr Brocklehurst whom Nilay Erdem Ayyıldız (2017) calls "a corrupted religious figure" (p. 49). What he desires is not to "feed their [the girls'] vile body" since it might "starve their immortal souls" (Brontë, 1992, p. 53). Moreover, he aspires to make the girls completely invisible by cutting their curly hair and top knots off. For him, "the lusts of the flesh" (Brontë, 1992, p. 54) can be avoided by repressing their femininity.

Mr Brocklehurst's acts may seem like a conservative man's naïve attempts to cultivate morally sound female figures in Victorian society. Nevertheless, alienating these girls from their own bodies and sexual desires can be regarded as an attempt to subordinate them. Audre Lorde (1984) states that women are made to survive "at a distant/inferior position" when their sexuality and sexual desires are manipulated by the male-centred order (p. 88). Forcing women to deny their own sexuality, then, has the potential to disempower them. It may even serve to consolidate a pseudo-discourse that Betty Friedan (1974) calls "the feminine mystique"**,** and this discourse "encourages women to ignore the question of their identity" (p. 96). Mr Brocklehurst's mentality and rules, then, function to avoid the girls' reconciliation with their bodies and thus with their own sexuality, thereby making the girls conform to the patriarchal discourse implicitly. Despite his punitive acts and harsh conditions at Lowood, Jane grows up as a woman who can master "the rising hysteria" (Brontë, 1992, p. 56) in her inner world and does not renounce her individuality by obeying the patriarchal norms.

Mr Brocklehurst regards vanity as a miserable sin; however, when Jane's descriptions of his daughters and wife are examined, his attitude appears to be hypocritical (Erdem Ayyıldız, 2017, p. 148). As Jane says,

> *They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lectures on dress, for they splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs. The two younger of the trio fine girls of sixteen and seventeen) had grey beaver hats, then in fashion, shaded with ostrich plumes, and from under the brim of this graceful head-dress fella profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled; the elderly lady was enveloped in costly velvet shawl, trimmed with ermine, and she wore a false front of French curls. (Brontë, 1992, p. 55)*

His wife and daughters' hairstyles, luxurious dresses, and fashionable hats clash with his so-called Christian mission. They can display their femininity without the restrictions that the orphaned girls suffer from. The stylish clothes of these women, then, indicate that they are more independent than the orphaned girls at Lowood.

Mrs Brocklehurst and her daughters, on the one hand, may seem to be luckier and freer; on the other hand, those women's appearances unravel another form of patriarchal oppression. The clothing of Victorian women consolidated the standards determined by the bourgeoisie, and clothes turned them into objects of the male gaze. As Helene E. Roberts (1977) states, clothing does not merely change the physical appearance of an individual; it affects the "actions and attitudes of both the wearer and the viewer" (p. 554). Clothes, in this sense, cannot be viewed as decorative objects designed for male and female figures. For instance, the clothes of Victorian women, such as corsets, crinolines, and heavy petticoats, not only restricted their movements but also deepened the difference between male and female sexes (Roberts, 1977, pp. 555-558). The clothing of Victorian women, then, limited women physically and served to reinforce gendered submissive roles

prescribed for women symbolically. The clothing both rendered women "beautiful object[s] of contemplation" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 26) and disseminated the image of a feeble woman. Hence, the clothing of middle-class women, like Mrs Brocklehurst's and her daughters', may seem to be a sign of freedom compared to the clothing of the orphaned girls at Lowood, and yet profound analysis of these women's clothes unearths another implicit oppressive tool of the patriarchal order.

In addition to the repression of female sexuality and women's clothing, the sexualisation and objectification of women can function to subjugate women in the patriarchal order. According to a report published by The American Psychological Association, sexualisation is the improper imposition of sexuality upon a person through the objectification and overvaluation of a person's sexual attributes (Zurbriggen et al., 2007, p. 1). Considering this definition, it is not possible to argue that sexualisation pervaded in the Victorian era. After all, repression, confinement, and taboos were emblematic of Victorian society. Comparing the 17th century with the Victorian period, Michel Foucault (1978), for example, underlines that the Victorian bourgeoisie significantly confined sexuality, and sexuality was subordinated to reproduction (p. 3). Nonetheless, one cannot deny that Victorian women were objectified or their sexual attributes were overvalued.

Brontë displays the sexualisation of women by depicting specific victimised female characters, such as Adele Varens and Miss Ingram. Undoubtedly, they are "negative 'role models' for Jane," but they are also prominent members of "Vanity Fair" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 350). For instance, Adele Varens is obsessed with her physical appearance and ornamentations, although she is a little child. In Gilbert and Gubar's words, she is a "doll-like" girl who never desires "freedom" similar to her mother, Celine Varens (2000, p. 350). In fact, she performs like a performer to grab Mr Rochester's attention from time to time, as Victorian women feel obliged to do in society. Therefore, she can also be regarded as a female figure who is exposed to sexualisation in society and knows nothing more than entertaining others. Similarly, absent-minded Miss Ingram becomes a sexual object in the novel with her robes and beauty. She seems to have internalised the idea that physical appearance and beauty define the worth of a woman. Therefore, she does not refrain from mocking Jane for being plain. She thinks "beauty" and "loveliness" are "the special prerogative of woman" (Brontë, p. 157). She cannot prove her identity without her physical appearance and can define herself in accordance with the prescribed norms of the male-dominated order. As can be seen, Adele Varens enables the author to portray how women start to internalise the subordination of women through objectification as of their childhood, and Miss Ingram helps her display how women gradually transform into sexual objects in Victorian society.

The author, on the other hand, frees Jane Eyre from the standards which objectify women by depicting her in a plain black dress and emphasising her independent nature. Jane refuses to constrain her identity with artificially constructed norms of beauty. For example, Mr Rochester forces Jane to accept the feminine role of the Victorian era by giving Jane his surname and jewellery (Brontë, 1992, p. 217), but Jane hates to be dressed like a doll (Brontë, p. 237). She is courageous enough to decline the marriage proposal of a man like Mr Rochester (Ellis and Kaplan, 1981, p. 85). Eventually, she rejects the idea of being a bird in the hands of Mr Rochester (Brontë, 1992, p. 223). When necessary, she manifests the fact that she is not "an angel" (Brontë, 1992, p. 239), thereby "subverting the Victorian women's attributed role as 'angel in the house'" (Erdem Ayyıldız, 2017, p. 150). As can be seen, she is completely different from Miss Ingram, who attempts to exist in the Victorian social system through her beauty. Jane not only rejects being an objectified woman but also challenges becoming a woman whose autonomy and choices are restricted. In other words, she revolts against becoming a sexual possession of a man or a docile woman without losing her love for Mr Rochester. As Eagleton puts forward, "Jane moves deftly between male and female roles in her courtship of Rochester" (2005, p. 31). In this way, she avoids being a victimised feminine figure of Victorian society and challenges the cloaked repression of the patriarchal order.

Jane also attempts to reclaim power by associating herself with the wives of Samson and Hercules wives. The flirtatious dialogue between Mr Rochester and Jane below demonstrates how she manipulates Mr Rochester and evades being a docile woman:

-I am influenced—conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express, and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win. Why do you smile, Jane? What does that inexplicable, that uncanny turn of countenance mean?

-I was thinking, sir (you will excuse the idea; it was involuntary), I was thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers. (Brontë, 1992, p. 229)

In her imaginary world, she associates herself with Hercules' charmer or wife, Megara, the eldest daughter of King Creon in Greek mythology. Megara was a noble but tragic mythological character, who was murdered by her maddened husband. Jane's association, thus, can be read as her attempt to elevate herself to the status of a noblewoman despite confronting hardships. Another character that she thinks of is a biblical character, Delilah, who is believed to have destroyed Samson

after learning his secret concerning his hair. Drawing parallels between Jane's request for a comb to tame Mr Rochester's hair towards the end of the novel and Delilah's cutting Samson's hair, Peter Fjågesund (1999) argues that there exists "a very obvious connection between Mr Rochester and Jane on the one hand, and the story of Samson on the other" (p. 450). Rather than associating herself with sexualised female characters like Miss Ingram, she associates herself with powerful mythological female characters, thereby finding the courage to defy patriarchal impositions.

The protagonist does not accept the gender role prescribed for Victorian women. She demonstrates this rejection by her powerful feelings, courage, and wit. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000) underline, Jane offers to help Mr Rochester who turns into a novice prince when he falls off his horse, she rescues Mr Rochester when Bertha tries to burn his bed, and she helps him when Richard Mason is wounded (pp. 352-353). The protagonist, in this sense, does not comply with the prescribed feminine roles of the Victorian era. Additionally, although Mr Rochester is depicted as a man who manipulates Jane and makes her envy Miss Ingram at the beginning of the novel, he transforms into a crippled and blind man who cannot exert dominance over autonomous Jane as a result of the fire in Thornfield Hall towards the end of the novel. In particular, "when they finally marry, they have become equals" (Showalter, 1977, p. 117), and they can also be viewed as "spiritually equals" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 352) at the end of the novel. It is even possible to argue that Jane becomes superior to Mr Rochester to a certain extent. Jane inherits a great sum of money from her uncle and acquires her financial freedom. In this way, she can pursue her dreams without being manipulated by Mr Rochester. Furthermore, she is physically sounder compared to Mr Rochester with physical disabilities, and she is not less intellectual than him. Jane is, then, more than equal to Mr Rochester. Accordingly, the author questions the patriarchal oppression in the Victorian era through the constraints Jane faces and eventually makes the gender roles attributed to women and men upside-down at the end of the novel.

Brontë subverts the patriarchal norms through Jane's independent spirit and rebellious attitude. Furthermore, the author employs Jane as her spokesperson and allows her to make daring speeches like the one below to challenge coercive gender roles:

> *Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë, 1992, p. 95)*

Long before the feminist uprising against patriarchal oppression, Brontë demonstrates how women are restricted in the male-dominated Victorian society, and she revolts against confining women to a couple of artificially constructed roles through Jane's thought-provoking statements. In this way, she subtly allows both men and women in the Victorian era to reconsider gender roles conceptually and takes a significant step to make the reader sympathise with the subordinated Victorian women's condition.

The male gaze is another significant element that reinforces the male authority. Laura Mulvey (1999) elucidates the function of the male gaze as follows:

> *In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (p. 837)*

As can be seen, the male gaze plays a pivotal role in redefining and consolidating women's roles as passive and sexual objects to be looked at. The power of the male gaze is also observed in the novel through Mr Rochester's and John Rivers' looks. For instance, when Mr Rochester rides to Thornfield Hall, he has an accident and encounters Jane for the first time. When Jane asks her questions about Thornfield Hall and himself, he examines her by running his eye on Jane's simple dress (Brontë, 1992, p.99). Furthermore, he waits and watches Jane "for some time" while she tries to give him the horse's bridle (Brontë, 1992, p. 100). To give another example, Mr Rochester looks at Jane "gently and seriously" for a long time without speaking before he proposes to her for the first time (Brontë, 1992, p. 223). It is possible that Mr Rochester might look at Jane with admiration or love, but his looks still remind us of "the determining male gaze" Mulvey (1999) emphasises. After all, as a wealthy white male, he can assume that his gaze on a woman, especially a governess like Jane, is natural, and his looks reinforce his patriarchal authority and power tacitly. Likewise, St. John Rivers' looks at Moor House seem to have arisen from the patriarchal power he holds, and Jane expresses how these looks discomfort her as follows:

> *One afternoon, however, I got leave to stay at home, because I really had a cold. His sisters were gone to Morton in my*

stead: I sat reading Schiller; he, deciphering his crabbed Oriental scrolls. As I exchanged a translation for an exercise, I happened to look his way: there I found myself under the influence of the ever-watchful blue eye. How long it had been searching me through and through, and over and over, I cannot tell: so keen was it, and yet so cold, I felt for the moment superstitious—as if I were sitting in the room with something uncanny. (Brontë, 1992, p. 351)

His looks are so intense that even free-spirited Jane feels captivated by his eyes, and Jane realises that he has examined her thoroughly. St. John Rivers' prolonged and penetrating looks, then, can also be regarded as the manifestation of the male subject's assumed superiority over the female who are regarded as objects to be looked at, and these looks continue to consolidate the binary opposition between men and women as active and passive agents. Nevertheless, Brontë avoids Mr Rochester's exerting superiority over her by allowing Jane to look and examine Mr Rochester at times throughout the novel. As Jane is both the protagonist and the narrator of the novel, Brontë grants her a position of agency in which she can examine male subjects or resist the male gaze. For instance, the male gaze of Mr Rochester is reversed when Jane examines him from top to toe after the accident. Also, after Mr Rochester proposes to her, Jane wants to be an active agent by looking him in the eye, as the conversation below shows:

'Mr Rochester, let me look at your face, turn to the moonlight.'
'Why?'
'Because I want to read your countenance-turn!' (Brontë, 1992, p. 224)

She has the courage to examine a man as a nonconformist woman, and her demand reveals how she is different from the women who are made to comply with the patriarchal norms of Victorian society. Her unruly nature renders Jane as powerful as the other male subjects in the novel. Additionally, when Mr Rochester loses his sight temporarily towards the end of the novel, she becomes "his vision" (Brontë, 1992, p. 399) for around two years. Moreover, although St. John Rivers' looks influence Jane significantly at first, she has the chance to put him on probation after rejecting his marriage proposal. With many thoughts in her mind, she examines him thoroughly while "he is walking in the garden" (Brontë, 1992, p. 364). All these details indicate that the male gaze has a significant role in redefining women's roles in society as passive beings, but Brontë succeeds in elevating Jane to the position of a male subject. In this way, another oppressive agent of patriarchy is questioned and challenged in the novel.

Contrary to the expectations of Victorian society, Charlotte Brontë depicts a female character who is in pursuit of her autonomy. She even shocks the readers of the era through her proud and passionate protagonist (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 338). Most importantly, the author manages to challenge the sexualisation of Victorian women by making her character construct and retain her own identity even after facing various restrictions. However, Brontë desires to see Jane as a part of society. If the author wished to display Jane as a radical figure, she would not display Jane starting a family. Hence, Brontë endeavours to underline that women need to integrate into society, but the worth of women should not be defined by falsely named and constructed feminine roles.

Interrogating Patriarchal Oppression in the Film Adaptation

Victorian novels, comprising realistic narration juxtaposed with intriguing plots, maintain their popularity in the 21st century. The novels that have long enchanted their readers now reincarnate as film adaptations in the current century, and growing interest in these adaptations manifests itself through the rising popularity of film adaptations of various novels, such as *Wuthering Heights, Oliver Twist*, and *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre* (2006) directed by Susannah White is one of the most popular film adaptations of Brontë's novel and offers an alternative narrative to the novel. This four-part television adaptation produced by BBC can be regarded as a successful film adaptation subverting the sexualisation of Victorian women when compared to some earlier adaptations. To illustrate, *Jane Eyre* (1934), directed by Christy Cabanne, fails to depict Jane as an unruly character who challenges patriarchal oppression in Victorian society. Likewise, *Jane Eyre* (1944), directed by Robert Stevenson, and *Jane Eyre* (1970), directed by Delbert Mann, are not "ultimately able to retain the centrality of Jane's point of view" (Ellis and Kaplan, 1981, p. 83). Nevertheless, *Jane Eyre* (2006) presents a protagonist who can exist outside the prescribed feminine roles thanks to her eccentric nature.

Novels have long offered readers to create new worlds in their minds and visualise characters' adventures in these new worlds. Film adaptations of novels, now, enable the audience to witness those fictional characters' worlds in visualised forms facilitated through cinematic techniques. Likening adaptations to translated or interpreted works, Dudley Andrew (2000) considers an adaptation to be "the appropriation of a meaning from a prior text" (p. 29). In this sense, a close link between the original work and the adaptation is inevitable, and the intended meaning is still attempted to be conveyed in film adaptations. It is even possible to argue that film adaptations can potentially transform into significant narratives fusing "the

powers of poetry and painting in an extraordinary synthesis" (Scholes, 1976, p. 290). However, film adaptations cannot free themselves from the label of being a copy of the original work. Linda Hutcheon (2006) highlights that a noticeable bias exists towards film adaptations by giving examples of several critics like Robert Stam, who still considers them to be a part of low culture, and she challenges the notion that adaptations are inferior to the original text. Hutcheon defines adaptation comprehensively as "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works [,] a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging [and] an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (2000, p. 8). As can be discerned from the definitions and detections above, a conscious conveyance of the original work through distinct narrative techniques, maintaining intertextual references, and rewriting or reshooting creatively are the key elements expected in a well-made adaptation. In this regard, the film adaptation of *Jane Eyre* proves not to be less significant or successful than the original text by conveying the novel's central messages and creating a unified effect on the audience.

The link between the adapted work and the adaptation is undeniable, but, as Robert Stam underlines, "strict fidelity" to the original work is "not quite possible" (2000, p. 55). Therefore, the success of an adaptation is linked to its autonomy and "creativity" more than its "fidelity" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 20). This does not mean that an adaptation and an adapted work should not include similarities; on the contrary, it is utterly natural to see remarkable parallelism. For example*, Jane Eyre* (2006) enables the audience to witness the patriarchal impositions that Jane faces and depicts Jane as an eccentric woman who counters the sexualisation of women by including various plot details from the novel. The film, similar to the novel, not only underlines Jane's unruly nature but also demonstrates how Jane struggles to avoid becoming a subordinated woman and to attain an independent identity. Nevertheless, "when a literary work is translated into a film, it is metamorphosed," and "producer's and director's interpretation" is one of the primary agents of this metamorphosis. (Klein, 1981, p. 5). Accordingly, the director of the film, Susannah White (2006), conveys Brontë's central arguments in the film adaptation not by copying the novel but by recreating the original work (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 8) without disregarding "the author's central concerns" and "the ambiance of the novel" (Klein, 1981, p. 9). White (2006) includes several additional scenes and makes several minor changes, thereby bringing a new shade of colour to the narrative.

To begin with, as usual in most films, several contributors, actors, and actresses are introduced before the film starts. Although the display of credits is generally the dullest part of films, the director uses this part to indicate some key characteristics of Jane. She uses a red velvety background while displaying the credits. In this way, she signifies both the rage and passion of the protagonist that Gilbert and Gubar (2000) indicate. A simple detail of colour or texture employed by the director becomes a highly effective narrative method that provides valuable hints regarding the protagonist. The director next focuses on the imaginative world of Jane since it mostly becomes the only tool to challenge the suffocating norms of society for Jane. While she is looking at the illustrations of a book, she falls into a dream. Nevertheless, Jane is displayed in the midst of a desert even in her dream. The intentional use of such a dry setting deftly signifies Jane's barren life as an outcast in Gateshead Hall. Furthermore, a scene in which the Reeds are posing for an artist is subtly created by the director to show Jane's isolation. She is not invited to pose, and Georgiana Reed, one of the daughters of Mrs Reed, alienates Jane from the family portrait by saying, "She is not part of the family" (White, 2006, 00:03:41). This additional scene further highlights Jane's marginalised position in society as the novel endeavours to indicate. Most importantly, this scene becomes functional to display the submissive role of Victorian women. Mrs Reed and her daughters sit on chairs or the ground, pose obediently, and become the objects of the male artist's gaze. However, when John Reed appears in the scene as a male figure with a rifle, which may be regarded as a phallic symbol, he prefers to stand up and makes a minacious joke by telling the artist, "Don't worry I won't shoot you unless we don't like the painting" (White, 2006, 00:03:33-00:03:35). He breaks the silence and stands proudly next to his mother, leaning on his rifle. Even their body postures, such as standing and sitting, in the portrait hint at some significant facts about the gendered identities and male superiority in the Victorian era. Considering the fact that certain feminine and masculine roles start to be taught at a very early age in patriarchal order (Chodorow, 1978, p. 209) and that gender is constructed "through stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1999, p. 190), this short scene successfully serves to reveal how the individuals internalise certain gender roles through simple but systematic acts as of their childhood in the Victorian era.

One cannot expect adaptations to include all the details or descriptions apparent in novels. As Michael Klein argues, "there has to be a good deal of selection and condensation when a novel, which may take several days to read, is transposed into a film of roughly two hours: some scenes have to be cut, minor characters simplified or eliminated, dispended with" (1981, p. 9). Accordingly, White (2006) also excludes some details or briefly addresses some incidents taking place in the novel. For example, Jane's fainting in the red room as a result of the trauma she experienced is not visualised even though her trauma can still be felt by the audience, particularly through the red room scene in which she sees horrible hallucinations of her late uncle. To give another example, White (2006) conveys Jane's terrifying experiences after she escapes from Thornfield Hall after learning the fact about Bertha, Mr Rochester's wife locked in the attic, and her recovery process next to the Rivers in

Marsh End through a few flashbacks instead of employing a detailed narration, as is the case in the novel. Nevertheless, she manages to demonstrate Jane's disappointment and misery through these flashbacks remarkably and indicates significant turning points in her journey to autonomous identity. As can be seen, the adaptation preserves "the ambiance of the novel" (Klein, 1981, p. 9) despite certain simplifications.

Journeys have long been accepted as significant experiences for the characters of the fictional world. Acknowledging the male bias in theorising journeys in literature, Christopher Vogler (2007) argues that "men's journeys may be in some sense more linear, proceeding from one outward goal to the next, while women's journeys may spin or spiral inward and outward" (p. xxi). Nevertheless, Brontë breaks this pattern. In the novel, "Jane Eyre makes a life-long journey which is a kind of mythical progress from one significantly named place to another," and her journey is a sort of "pilgrimage towards maturity" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p. 342, p. 366). Likewise, White (2006) shatters the throne of male heroes through the detailed descriptions of Jane's journeys. The difficulties that she is going to face are implied through visual and auditory elements. For instance, when Jane moves to Lowood Orphanage from Gateshead Hall, it is depicted to be a freezing winter day. She continues her journey in a black cab drawn by black horses, the sound of the crows flying over the defoliated trees accompanies her, and she arrives at Lowood at night in a gloomy atmosphere (White, 2006, 00:06:28-00:06:50). Despite the terrible conditions at Lowood, she learns what friendship means, dares to challenge a patriarch like Mr Brocklehurst, gets educated, and becomes a stronger woman. Finally, she advertises and achieves becoming a governess at Thornfield Hall. Jane's journey to Thornfield Hall starts in the morning. The weather is sunny, and the scenery is green rather than gloomy. Nevertheless, she can arrive in Thornfield Hall when it is evening and the weather turns foggy (White, 2006, 00:16:45-00:17:34). While the idyllic scenery implies Jane's hope and excitement, the end of her journey indicates some predicaments and disappointments she will experience there. Jane starts to earn her own money, finds the chance to read from Mr Rochester's library, observes a great number of people from the bourgeoisie in the balls, and tastes the feeling of love without losing her autonomy there. She continues to improve herself as a woman with an independent nature. However, when Jane learns about Mr Rochester's insane wife Bertha, she leaves Thornfield, too.

Her isolation and desolation during her journey to Marsh End in the fourth episode are also highlighted through her solitary walk and the depiction of vast bleak moors and rocks (White, 2006, 00:00:32-00:00:42). As can be seen, Jane confronts several physical and emotional ups and downs before and after her journeys, but she never transforms into a feeble female character who conforms to the patriarchal norms of the Victorian era. Therefore, one can argue that White (2006) displays Jane as a heroine who improves physically, emotionally, and mentally after each of her journeys, thereby allowing Jane to experience a "linear" journey throughout the adaptation. In this way, she liberates the protagonist from "spinning," as is expected in the patriarchal order.

When the scene moves to Lowood Orphanage, the difficult lives of the orphaned girls are vividly portrayed. Cold and dark wards of the orphaned children, leaking roofs, and frozen water in bowls that children have to use before washing their faces all visualise the harsh conditions little girls are exposed to. The sad end of numerous girls in this institution is masterfully emphasised through the coffins and graveyards next to the orphanage. Furthermore, how the orphaned girls are made to be stripped of their feminine appearance with their caps that cover their hair and demure clothes is wisely underlined by the director, but military-like control over the girls to eradicate their vanity is not highlighted in the adaptation as vividly as in the novel. The contrast between the girls' black robes and Mr Brocklehurst's daughter's colourful clothes is also displayed for a short time without focusing on Mr Brocklehurst's hypocritical attitude. Thus, one can argue that the patriarchal suppression of women is conveyed mostly through Mr Brocklehurst's reproachful speeches.

White (2006) successfully displays that Jane continues to be punished at the orphanage, too, since she does not comply with what middle-class society expects from women, and this fact is declared through Mr Brocklehurst's endeavour to make Jane an outcast at the orphanage labelling her a liar in front of her peers. Different from the novel, Mr Brocklehurst asks the other girls in the orphanage to hang a liar sign around Jane's neck and makes her stand on the stool without any food and drinks much longer by setting a deadline "until midnight" (White, 2006, 00:09:48). She stands on the stool without moving for hours, which is nearly impossible for a girl of her age, and this shows how Jane is different from the other repressed girls. The director not only demonstrates the oppressive patriarchal control over girls through this scene but also indicates Jane's strength in character and passive resistance against the patriarchal norms.

What Brontë narrates about Jane's childhood years in the ten chapters of the novel is conveyed in the first fifteen minutes of the adaptation through condensation. Next, White (2006) starts to describe Jane's experiences at Thornfield Hall. She displays Jane and Mr Rochester's first encounter and depicts Mr Rochester as a stern and perverse character, as is the case in the novel. For instance, Mr Rochester behaves very rudely to Jane and when he falls off his horse, he suddenly accuses Jane of being a "witch" (White, 2006, 00:30:50). In this way, the prevalent male bias towards women of the era is indicated more powerfully. Most importantly, an invented dialogue between Jane and Mr Rochester in this scene helps to reflect Jane's

characteristics better:

'Well, that's what happens when you bewitch a man's horse, Miss Eyre. A lot of pain and cursing.'

'I did not bewitch your horse, sir.' (White, 2006, 00:27:23-00:27:30)

As can be seen, Jane refuses all the allegations of witchcraft about his fall. Such a conversation on witchcraft does not exist in the novel, yet it enables the audience to discern Jane's free-spirited nature. In other words, this dialogue gives the director a chance to portray Jane as a nonconformist woman who does not comply with the traditional roles of Victorian women.

Thornfield Hall also provides the audience with a chance to compare and contrast Jane's childhood with Adele Varens. Jane was depicted as an unruly girl who could not be moulded by patriarchal oppression despite her terrific experiences at Gateshead Hall and Lowood. Nevertheless, Adele Varens, the daughter of Celine Varens who was Mr Rochester's former lover, is known to be brought up with the help of Mr Rochester, and she seems to have already internalised gender roles prescribed for women. For instance, when Jane, as a governess, meets Adele for the first time, Adele introduces herself by singing a romance in French. In the romance, the impossible love of a woman "who loves pretty dresses" (White, 2006, 00:22:10) is narrated. The song and Adele's attempt to please her spectators remind the audience of the predetermined passive and submissive roles of women in the Victorian era. Furthermore, she is obsessed with her physical appearance and beauty. She only thinks of wearing her best dresses and making everybody think that she is beautiful (White, 2006, 00:41:11). In Mr Rochester's words, she is a "frivolous doll" (White, 2006, 00:30:53). As can be seen, Adele is like the miniature representation of an objectified and subordinated woman in the Victorian era, and the difference between Jane and Adele reveals that the patriarchal order can easily normalise and reproduce certain roles if they are not questioned.

In the second episode of the adaptation, a great number of guests are invited to the ball held by Mr Rochester. In the ball hall of Thornfield Hall, most of the young ladies are depicted as gorgeous and passive figures with their glimmering dresses, similar to ravishing and angel-like fairy tale characters. Miss Ingram, for example, is depicted as a blonde woman with fascinating eyes, and she looks like a fairy in her cotton-white gown. It is hinted through the physical descriptions of women that they are not different from inert statues to be looked at. Besides, a conversation between some gentlemen and women is included in this scene to display how women are considered sexual objects in society. One of the gentlemen in the ball defines two sisters as "fine examples of split female embryos" who "move alike and sound alike" (White, 2006, 00:20:08-00:21:00). This seemingly insignificant scene becomes functional to discover that not only the sisters but women in a broader sense are attempted to be turned into fine objects to please the male desire in the Victorian era. The sisters' answer to the gentleman, "everybody is interested in us" (White, 2006, 00:21:20), reveals how women internalise being objectified in that society as well. In other words, it is indicated that the objectification of women is consolidated through the women who consider their roles to be innate.

As is the case in the novel, the subordinated and objectified women of Victorian society, such as the sisters in the ball, Miss Ingram, and Adele Varens, are included in the adaptation. Nevertheless, the subordination of women is subverted in the adaptation with the help of Jane's intellect, witty reactions, and heroic deeds. Contrary to the women in the ball hall, Jane neither strives to attract men through her physical appearance nor accompanies men like a passive receptor. She wears a plain gown, but she can share her opinions on various topics just like the men in the hall as she is more interested in improving herself intellectually. Moreover, although Mr Rochester attempts to manipulate her by implying a relationship with Miss Ingram and employing a gypsy fortune teller to learn Jane's real feelings, Jane can control her feelings and anger, thereby nullifying his plots. She is demonstrated as intelligent as Mr Rochester. Additionally, when Jane and Mr Rochester have conversations, particularly on the stairs, Mr Rochester is sometimes positioned above Jane on the stairs. This indicates Mr Rochester's superiority over a young poor woman. Nevertheless, the director positions Jane on the balcony or in one of the rooms of Thornfield, where none of the guests see her and where she has the chance to examine both Mr Rochester and the others like a male gazer. The male superiority or the force of the male gaze is, then, balanced through Jane's all-seeing position. Most importantly, as is the case in the novel, White (2006) displays Jane as a heroine in the adaptation. Jane is the woman who saves Mr Rochester's life by warning him of the fire next to her bed (White, 2006, 00:04:03), and traditional gender roles between males and females are once more transgressed through these details.

In the next episode, the director employs a setting that is full of red flowers and in which the birds are chattering for the proposal scene of Mr Rochester. In this way, she implies the passionate love between lovers. Also, the music chosen by the director could be regarded as significant in this scene considering Hutcheon's (2006) emphasis on the significance of sound and music to indicate the inner world of a character as it might be difficult to display it visually (p. 58). The music becomes functional to imply the love of the characters and to have an insight into their inner worlds. This proposal scene also functions to discover how Jane tries to retain her identity and how Mr Rochester, as a male figure, tries to abuse Jane through his economic and patriarchal power. However, Jane is displayed as powerful enough to challenge his heartless attitude by saying,

"do you think that I am a machine? [. . .] Do you think because I am poor, plain, obscure, and little that I have no heart? that I am without soul? I have as much heart as you and as much so" (White, 2006, 00:35:32-00:36:00). Although she loves Mr Rochester passionately, she has the courage to state that "I am a free person" (White, 2006, 00:21:20). In addition, although Mr Rochester asks Jane to get on a white ornamented carriage, she refuses and desires to get on a simpler carriage, and her request is accepted by Mr Rochester. Likewise, despite the fact that Mr Rochester does not allow Adele to travel with them, Jane makes her a prerequisite for their journey. As can be seen, Jane is depicted as a woman who does not submit to the orders of a patriarchal figure. She never sacrifices her free will and autonomy despite her love for Mr Rochester. In addition, how Jane refuses to be an object of Mr Rochester is emphasised in the adaptation through her choice of plain fabrics, clothes, and jewels which are contrary to Mr Rochester's expectations. Towards the end of the scene, the beautiful and relaxing atmosphere gives way to thunderstorms and lightning through which the director foreshadows Jane's fate as Brontë does in the novel.

Various cinematic techniques are employed in adaptations. As Klein (1981) states, "a flash-back, a dream, or in recent films perhaps also a flash-forward" are employed to "represent multiple layers of time and consciousness: time past, time present, future time, imaginative time" (p. 8). There are various examples of such techniques in the adaptation as well. For instance, flashbacks in Jane's memory become functional to visualise Jane's suffering after her departure from Thornfield Hall in the final scene. In this scene, White (2006) prefers to employ a barren setting again to signify Jane's disappointment and the difficulties she faces. Although St. John's disturbing looks are not visualised in the adaptation, Jane's self-reliance and desire for independence are clearly highlighted. Jane rejects the ambitious and domineering St. John's proposal after her intense reasoning. Furthermore, White (2006) elevates Jane to the position of a Romantic poet in nature and tranquillity by portraying Jane sitting on a rock that overlooks vast lands and green areas. While she is trying to come to a decision about St. John's offer, she aspires to have a fresh perspective in a serene setting isolated from the corrupted civilization. In this way, the director finds a chance to demonstrate Jane's unruly nature and subverts the passive role of a woman.

Towards the end of the adaptation, Jane visits Thornfield Hall. As in the novel, she manages to affect Mr Rochester's feelings and manipulate Mr Rochester to a certain extent by making him envy St. John. Moreover, Mr Rochester who has tried to cage a wild bird at the beginning of the film turns out to be a predator in a cage since he is crippled and nearly blind. The director subverts gender roles prescribed in Victorian society by displaying Jane as a powerful woman who never renounces her own identity thanks to various details existing in the novel and several additional scenes. At the end of the adaptation, White (2006) employs a scene in which all the members of Thornfield Hall pose for an artist in the garden. The scene reminds the audience of the portrait drawn at Gateshead Hall. In the Reeds' portrait, Jane was excluded, female characters were sitting on stools obediently, and the only man, John Reed, was standing next to his mother with his rifle in his hand. Nevertheless, all the members, including servants, appear in the large family portrait drawn at Thornfield Hall. Even a nonhuman figure, Mr Rochester's dog called Pilot, finds a place in the portrait. The patriarch, Mr Rochester, does not stand like John Reed in the portrait but sits next to his lover, Jane Eyre. They are positioned next to each other, and this indicates the equality between them. As can be seen, the first and the last portrait in the adaptation are the opposite of each other. While the first one gives glimpses of the patriarchal framework of the Victorian era, the second one provides clues about the social structure that Jane strives to establish. Women are not subordinated but are regarded as equals in the second portrait. Moreover, the director does not merely display Jane and Rochester's happy life with their babies, as is the case in the novel. White (2006) depicts Jane among a lot of people in the portrait, and this indicates that Jane does not desire to be detached from society or lead a life in isolation. On the contrary, she wishes to be a part of that society with her autonomous identity. She wants to exist in Victorian society without submitting to the patriarchal norms and losing her autonomy, and the final scene functions to highlight an independent woman's wish in Victorian society.

Conclusion

Women were subjugated through various patriarchal tools during the Victorian era. Gender roles, sexualisation, objectification, clothing, and the male gaze were the predominant patriarchal agents that played a significant role in the subordination process of women, and this study discussed the role of these agents in consolidating patriarchal oppression by focusing on both Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and its BBC film adaptation.

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* not only demonstrates the patriarchal constraints women suffer from but also incisively critiques the patriarchal oppression prevalent in the Victorian era through its defiant female protagonist. The author portrays victimised Victorian women by including some subjugated female figures in Victorian society. Furthermore, she challenges patriarchal oppression by depicting Jane Eyre's arduous journey in which she resists being reduced to a mere passive object and declines to conform to the restrictive norms of femininity. Likewise, the film adaptation of *Jane Eyre, directed* by Susannah White, translates Brontë's critical vision regarding patriarchal oppression onto the screen. Despite several additional scenes and

changes, the adaptation preserves the core messages of the novel. The director also effectively presents Jane as an autonomous female character who can defy social restrictions that nullify and objectify women. The portrayal of Jane as a woman who rejects prescribed gender roles and attains autonomy towards the final scenes parallels the narrative trajectory of the novel. Jane Eyre emerges as a potent symbol of resistance against the subjugation of women in both the novel and the film adaptation in spite of their distinct narrative techniques. Accordingly, this study asserts that the novel and the adaptation demonstrate patriarchal impositions and deftly challenge the subordination of women in the Victorian era.

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