



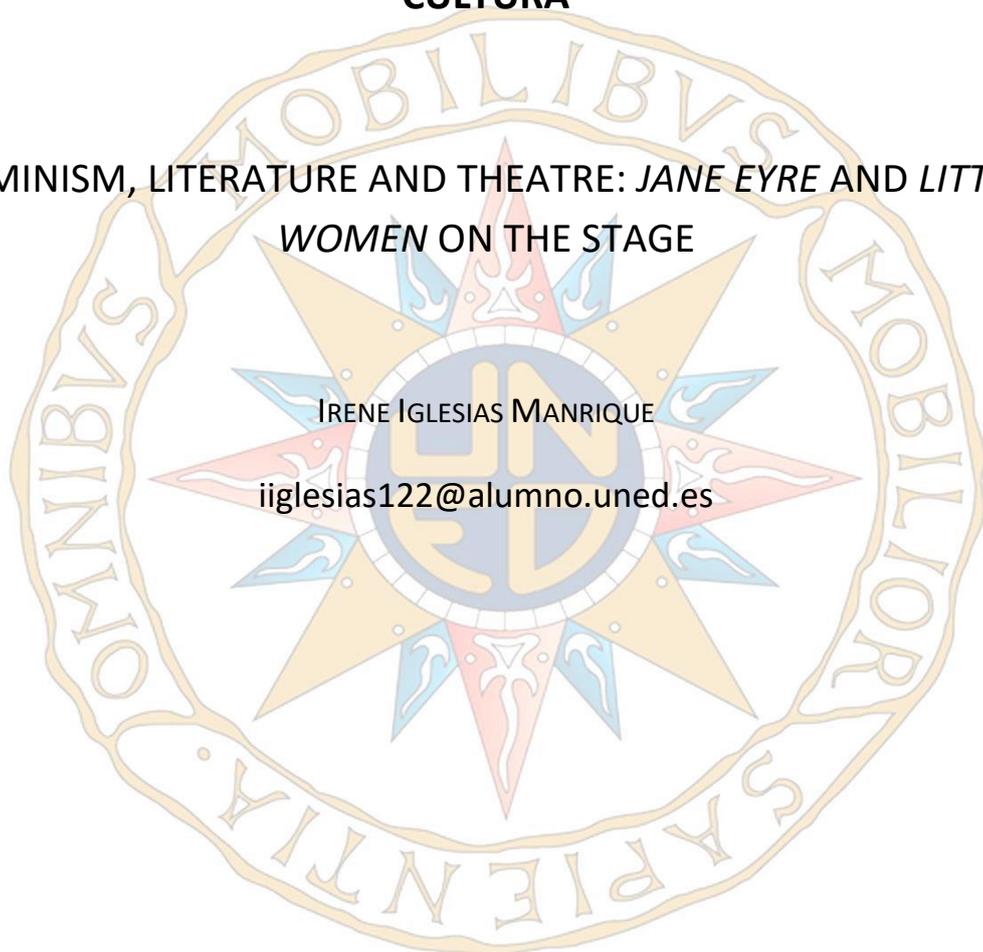
**TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO**

**GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: LENGUA, LITERATURA Y  
CULTURA**

FEMINISM, LITERATURE AND THEATRE: *JANE EYRE* AND *LITTLE  
WOMEN ON THE STAGE*

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## **Abstract**

The influence of feminism not only on the literary classics but also on the theatre of the English-speaking countries has been widely studied by a high number of critics since the emergence of the literary criticism and the literary theory in the 20th century. The way theatre adaptations are conceived out of other literary works (like novels) is also a considerable topic in the field of literary research, which is closely linked to the theory of theatre and performance. *Little Women* and *Jane Eyre* are two feminist literary classics of the Anglo-Saxon literature that have been adapted to the stage in countless occasions. One of the main objects of this essay is the exploration of how two stage adapters of these novels, Marian de Forest for *Little Women* and Jay Richards for *Jane Eyre*, have shaped their works. That is, to what extent they have included the feminist approach of the original authors, as well as the reasons behind their choice.

**Key words:** stage adaptation, *Little Women*, *Jane Eyre*, feminism, oppression.

## Index

1.	Introduction.....	4
1.1.	Justification.....	4
1.2.	Objectives, Hypothesis, and Key Questions.....	6
1.3.	Methodology.....	6
1.4.	State-of-the-Art.....	8
1.4.1.	Adaptation Theories: from the Page to the Stage.....	8
1.4.2.	Theatre and Feminism.....	10
1.4.3.	Other Adaptations to the Stage of <i>Jane Eyre</i> and <i>Little Women</i> .....	13
2.	Analysis of the Selected Plays.....	15
2.1.	Analysis of <i>Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts</i> .....	15
2.1.1.	The Context.....	16
2.1.2.	The Adaptation.....	18
2.1.3.	The Characters.....	22
2.1.4.	Key Issues.....	25
2.1.4.1.	Marriage.....	25
2.1.4.2.	Private/Public Sphere.....	26
2.1.4.3.	Gender Identity.....	27
2.1.4.4.	Motherhood.....	27
2.2.	Analysis of <i>Jane Eyre – A New Musical</i> .....	28
2.2.1.	The Context.....	28
2.2.2.	The Adaptation.....	31
2.2.3.	The Characters.....	34
2.2.4.	Key Issues.....	39
2.2.4.1.	Marriage.....	39
2.2.4.2.	Private/Public Sphere.....	40
2.2.4.3.	Gender Identity.....	41
2.2.4.4.	Motherhood.....	42
3.	Conclusions.....	44
4.	Bibliographical References.....	46

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Justification

We live in a society in which, according to Emily Dickinson, we as women ignore our true stature until we stand up, that is, we live asleep, with our huge potential buried, unless we become aware of it. 21<sup>st</sup>-century women must continue empowering one another and fighting against such current and significant problems such as job insecurity, salaries inequality, housework gender gap, sexist mistreatment and violence, sexual aggressions, sexist murders, or objectification. Because we, as women and citizens, are responsible for proposing solutions to improve the world we want our children to inherit, a world that will be theirs soon. Therefore, with this essay, I aim to research how feminist literature classics and their adaptations on stage can influence and inspire our generation and the following ones to become aware of the necessity of feminism. This social change has already been evident in several instances of feminist initiatives and social movements that have arisen in Western countries for the last decades following these stage adaptations.

Two stage adaptations of the novels *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë) and *Little Women* (Louisa May Alcott) will be examined in this task: *Jane Eyre – A New Musical*, by Jay Richards, and *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts*, by Marian de Forest (both are stage adapters). These literary classics have been chosen due to their feminist portrayal of their main feminine characters, as both Jane Eyre and Jo March are independent women who reject the social conventions of their time. With respect to the stage adaptations, the ones written by the aforementioned adapters have been selected because their texts can more easily be read without copyright infringement than other writers’.

Moreover, the relation between feminism, literature, and drama is a topic whose presence in many subjects of Degrees in English Studies is considerable. At UNED, we find it appears in subjects such as ‘Gender and Literature in English Speaking Countries’, ‘Introduction to Contemporary British theatre’, ‘English Literature IV: The Turn to Postmodernity’ and ‘Comment of Literary Texts in English Language’. In addition, feminism is essential in the curricula of a high number of English Studies degrees at Spanish universities, such as at Complutense University, Autònoma University, Autònoma University of

Barcelona, or Basque Country University. It is also advisable to mention foreign universities whose academic programmes are similar: from Harvard University in the US to Swansea University in the UK, as well as Bologna University in Italy.

The academic relevance of the topic should not be forgotten due to the amount of academic research on literature, theatre, and feminism that can be found. Proof of this statement is the great presence of feminist approaches not only in PhDs but also in many academic publications.

Regarding PhDs, dozens of theses explore the cluster of feminism and theatre, from which a great variety of academic research can be obtained. To have a closer idea of how this corpus can be, some of the most significant titles will be mentioned: *Post-College Reflections on Involvement in "The Vagina Monologues": A Feminist Narrative Analysis* (Heather Danelle Shea); *Exploratory Theatre Activism: Implementing Theatre Pedagogy in Educational Landscapes* (Jennifer Sarah Iadevaia); and '¿Y este teatrillo se llama realidad?' *La (re)presentación de realidades sexuales y de género en seis dramaturgas mexicanas contemporáneas* (Laura A. Lusardi).

Moreover, some of the main academic publications on topics related to feminism and English literature classics adapted to stage should be closely explored. Their main ideas will be further explored in the State-of-the-Art section. On the one hand, an analysis about some works that explore general theories on theatre and stage adaptations will be provided in that section and, on the other hand, a range of works and essays that review the stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women* will be explored there too.

Consequently, a scope of study with a great abundance and variety of academic research is present in this essay, which proves the enormous relevance of this topic in the cultural arena of our society. However, the scripts of stage adaptations are usually not available to be analysed in libraries and on online databases, as many of them have copyrights or have not been published.

In addition, the academic relevance of the chosen topic also relies on the quality of the bibliographical resources related to it, as many authors have developed a powerful theoretical corpus of works related to theatre and feminism.

## **1.2. Objectives, Hypothesis, and Key Questions**

The main goal of this academic work is to explore how feminism is addressed in the theatre adaptation of two significant classics of English literature. Specifically, it aims to examine the plays of *Jane Eyre – A New Musical* (Richards) and *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts* (De Forest). The focus of the analysis will be based on whether and how the patriarchal system is challenged or accepted in the selected stage adaptations. This should provide an analysis of how adaptation and feminism work together.

Apart from this general objective, the specific goals are a) to review the adaptations (both the context and the adapted story), b) to examine the portrayal of the main feminine characters, and c) to analyse the approach of motherhood, marriage, housework, and gender identity in the selected plays.

Thus, this essay analyses the relation between feminism and two stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*, as both works include resilient, independent, and atypical feminine characters. Consequently, this essay aims to answer these questions: How are the feminist classics of English literature adapted to the stage? Do they challenge and subvert the patriarchal system including a feminist approach, as in the novels; or do they accept it, as a way to adapt to the predominant sexist ideology in order to have more audience and thus economic profits?

## **1.3. Methodology**

Firstly, the main sources used to research on this topic will be mentioned. There are a myriad of search engines specialised in academic content, such as the UNED library, LION, ProQuest, EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, DIALNET, Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, etc. In these databases not only can significant academic works and essays be found, but also academic journals. Since these documents are assessed by scientific committees, they are trustworthy sources. Most publications used as information sources have been written by university professors, albeit others are reviews of academic journal written by theatre critics.

Secondly, it is essential to review the most significant concepts addressed by the most important scholars of the field. On the one hand, the items related to general theories on adaptation will be depicted first, and, on the other hand, the ones linked to theatre and feminism will be described later.

Concerning the corpus of theories on theatre adaptations, I have selected first Linda Hutcheon's and Siobhan O'Flynn's main ideas on stage adaptations, which review the different possibilities regarding the medium, the adapter and his/her motivations, the audience, and the temporal and spatial context. These items can be used to analyse any adaptation, so they will help me to review the selected adaptations.

With respect to the ideas related to feminist theory and theatre, I will make use of several scholars' ideas. I will consider first the theoretical concepts that will help me to analyse Jay Richards' modern adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. Later, I will mention the ones related to the analysis of De Forest's adaptation of *Little Women*. Then I will address the main ideas that will contribute to explore both plays.

Regarding *Jane Eyre's* adaptation, I will use Elaine Aston's work on the influence of colonialism in the field, Sharon Friedman's concept of deconstruction, and Noelle Janaczewska's emphasis on the influence of literary and historical context on the feminist British theatre.

About *Little Women's* adaptation, Beverly Lyon Clark's vision of the adaptation as a 'sentimental domestic idyll' is considered thanks to her response to the review of the play by the critic Henry Taylor Parker. Besides, Meghan Skiles' review of the adaptation has also been included, in which she mentions positive reviews about the play. She also reflects on the evolution of the adaptations of the novel.

With respect to the concepts that will contribute to the analysis of both plays, the following ideas will be useful: Sue-Ellen Case's ideas on the different feminist trends in theatre (personal theatre, radical feminism, materialist feminism, and women of colour), Mark Fortier's concepts of 'deconstruction' and 'the male gaze', and Tiina Rosenberg's exploration of feminist and queer interpretations of opera and theatre.

As to the ideas linked to the stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*, Patsy Stoneman, Veronika Larsen, and Beverly Lyon Clark distinguish the early-stage adaptations, which are dated in the 19th century and are considered to have a more traditional and conservative approach. On the other hand, modern-stage adaptations of the second half of the 20th century are

regarded as more feminist versions by Wayne Hoffman, Evans Lloyd, and Meghan Skiles.

Thirdly, it is also essential to explore the structure that has been followed to elaborate this essay. It is organized in three chapters, besides the introduction, the conclusions, the bibliographical references, and the annexes. The first chapter is called 'Analysis of *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts*', which provides an exploration of the context, the adaptation, the main characters, and the key issues of the play. In this last subsection, the concepts of marriage, public/private sphere, gender identity, and motherhood will be analysed. The second chapter, 'Analysis of *Jane Eyre – A New Musical*', keeps the same structure than the previous chapter. A similar structure has been used in both chapters to provide a comparative analysis of the two plays.

#### **1.4. State-of-the-Art**

Under the light of the academic corpus on feminism in the stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*, a general overview on the topic can be provided. After considering the most significant concepts on this topic in the academic field (as well as its authors), they will be analysed in depth. In section 1.4.1., the main ideas on adaptation theories will be explored. Later, in section 1.4.2., the most relevant concepts related to theatre and feminism will be depicted. Finally, in section 1.4.3., the main previous adaptations of both *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women* will be examined.

##### **1.4.1. Adaptation Theories: from the Page to the Stage**

According to Hutcheon and O'Flynn, their analysis of any adaptation includes medium, adapter and reasons for the adaptation, audience, and context. These scholars relate each of these elements to a specific 'Wh-question', which will be explained below.

The question of 'What?' means revisiting the forms of the medium. This process invokes a long debate on the formal and material specifications of each art form, such as rhythm, movement, gesture, music, speech, image, writing, etc. In the case of a novel that is dramatized, it must be reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity. Some reviewers can see this cutting as a negative aspect,

although sometimes this condensation is considered positive since the play can become a powerful and direct representation of the conveyed message.

The concepts of 'Who?' and 'Why?' require an analysis of who the adapter is and the main motives and difficulties regarding adaptations. On the one hand, the author and the adapter can be the same person, although sometimes they can differ. Regarding operas the composer must be mentioned too. Actors can also be considered adapters since they give material existence to the adaptation through different gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, etc. Other important artists related to the adaptation process are the designer, the make-up artist, etc.

On the other hand, with respect to the main reasons behind an adaptation, Hutcheon and O'Flynn highlight the following ones: the economic lures, that is, the attempt to cash in on the success of certain works; the legal constraints, as adaptations may have legal consequences such as royalties, copyrights, etc; the cultural capital, as the purpose of many adaptations of literary classics is to educate and/or to gain respectability in terms of cultural cachet; and the personal and political motives, in which the position on the conveyed message of the adaptation is very relevant (subverting it, including other influences, etc).

Regarding 'How?', it explores different characteristics concerning audiences. The appeal of adaptations for the public lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty. The triumph of successful adaptations lies in how they reinvent the familiar and make it fresh with certain variations. Each target audience has different preferences about the stories they want to see adapted, which must be considered in the adaptation process.

As to 'Where?' and 'When?', they require a revision of how spatial and temporal context can affect an adaptation, as they can change how a story is received. Many adapters deal with this reality of reception by updating the time of the story in an attempt to find contemporary resonance for their audiences, e.g., including relevant themes of today.

Thus, I will reflect on how these six concepts are shaped in the two selected theatre adaptations. They will help me to better understand how the novels of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women* were adapted to stage and to analyse the resulting variations.

#### 1.4.2. Theatre and Feminism

Concerning the ideas related to feminist theory and theatre, several scholars' ideas will be analysed. I will consider first the most important theories that will help me to analyse Richards' modern adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. Later, I will mention the ones related to the analysis of De Forest's adaptation of *Little Women*. Then I will address the main research areas that will contribute to explore both plays.

With respect to the feminist theory related to the adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, Elaine Aston includes in her work the influence of colonialism on the field, which can be useful to explore the role of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*'s adaptation. This author presents 'voices from Black women's theatre in Britain, identifying their marginal position in relation to mainstream white, feminist theatre, and the re-shaping of feminist theory and theatrical practice which their marginality demands' (9). In addition, Sharon Friedman explores the freedom of the character of Jane Eyre to express her captive passion and complexity in the stage adaptations of the novel. She focuses on the dual function of Bertha Mason as a madwoman within Jane Eyre in the stage adaptations. Through Friedman's theory I will analyse the complexity of the character of Jane Eyre in the selected adaptation according to a feminist approach. Besides, Noelle Janaczewska emphasizes how the feminist theatre has managed to survive both the pervasive tendency of social realism in the British theatre during the last decades and Margaret Thatcher's conservative ideology. Following her ideas about the history of feminist theatre in the UK, I will be able to explore the possible influence of the British historical and literary context in Jay Richards' adaptation of *Jane Eyre*.

Regarding the adaptation of *Little Women*, Beverly Lyon Clark's essay analyses one of the most important reviews of De Forest's adaptation, that of the critic H.T.P. (Henry Taylor Parker). In this paper, she considers that the feminist approach of the play is much softer than the one of the novel (she even labels the adaptation as a 'sentimental domestic idyll'), mainly due to the differences between the representation of Jo March (the main character) in the novel and in the play. Her writing career is approached, as well as her personality traits and the evolution of the character. There are other items Clark also explores, however. She analyses the social and political atmosphere, focusing on how the ideas of reform and feminine suffrage are depicted in both works. She also

focuses on the influence of the setting and the props, such as the disposition of the furniture. Clark also reviews the audience's features of the play, exploring the Puritan demands on theatre. This way, following Clark's analysis I will be able to explore deeply the connection between the novel and the stage adaptation. Concerning Meghan Skiles' review of the adaptation, she briefly includes a reference to it, suggesting that 'critics called it a wonderful, long-deferred tribute to the dramatic element in her gifted nature' (3). I will make use of this idea together with Clark's theories to review the reasons behind the success of the play. Skiles also mentions the fact that Alcott's novel was so quickly adapted because of how immediately beloved and successful the novel was after its publication. This information will be useful for the exploration of the adapter's reasons.

As to the research areas that can help me to review both stage adaptations, I have highlighted the following scholars' theories. Sue-Ellen Case describes the relation between different feminist trends and theatre. First, she argues that personal theatre aims to recover the female experience to combine a personal voice with a discussion of certain theoretical elements, such as historical figures and events. This is defined as a deconstruction of the 'traditional systems of representation and perception of women in the process of positing women in the position of subject' (327). As to radical feminism (sometimes called cultural feminism, and being used by material feminists to underscore the distance of this position from a materialist approach), it is committed to radical change and direct political action. It is based on the belief that the patriarchy is the primary cause of the oppression on women, so it is required a new social system in which masculine supremacy be suppressed. This is the pervading position in the USA. Concerning the materialist feminism, it is a term used to cover the Marxist feminism and social feminism positions. Their common core is the historical materialism, which contradicts the universalism and essentialism of radical feminism in the assumption that patriarchy is everywhere and always the same, as well as that all women are 'sisters'. It provides the notion of class, economic organisation, national history, political organisation, and capitalism regarding the oppression of women. With respect to the perspective of women of colour, Case reflects on the notions of racial and class privilege in a context dominated by the white culture. She focuses on the United States, where black

women and Chicanas are the most common examples of oppressed subjects. Following these four categories, Case explains how the feminist political movement has affected theatre productions. Her ideas will contribute to explore how this feminist evolution has influenced the selected plays, especially the concept of radical feminism and the relation between feminism and women of colour. The first, which will be used to explore the 'traditional' feminist approach in De Forest's adaptation, will be present in the section 'The adaptation'; whereas the latter, which will be considered to analyse the role of Bertha Mason in Richards' work, will be addressed in the section 'The characters'.

Mark Fortier raises the idea of 'the male gaze', a theory created by Laura Mulvey. This concept is based on the vision of women from a masculine perspective. Women are often seen as the 'virgin' or the 'whore', therefore, 'one task of feminism is to overturn these traditional systems of representation' (Fortier, 111). The idea of 'deconstruction' is also present: 'Deconstruction is not interested in being satisfying... pushing to the limits where writing inevitably begins to contradict itself' (65). His ideas can contribute to a deep analysis of the section 'Key Issues', where the traditional roles and identities associated to women in the selected adaptations are reviewed.

Tiina Rosenberg explores feminist and queer interpretations of opera and theatre, which will help me to analyse the sexual identity of the characters of both plays from a feminist perspective. Rosenberg considers that 'critical feminist analysis often differs from queer approaches that are far more pleasure oriented' (12). Queer (especially gay male) studies have been particularly concerned with pleasure. 'The queer feminist combination allows us to analyse the ramifications and costs of pleasure while we remain attentive to queer methodologies, for they may capture a wide range of impulses beyond fixed and normative categories of gender and sexuality' (13). Themes such as sexuality, love, desire, sentimentality and so on are reviewed by Rosenberg. She also establishes a link between the queer theory and post colonialist theory, suggesting that the West has a masculine role, dominating and manipulating the docile and submissive East, which has a feminine role. These ideas will be especially useful when exploring the characters of Edward Rochester, Jane Eyre, and Bertha Mason.

### 1.4.3. Other Adaptations to the Stage of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*

Firstly, I will explore Stoneman's, Larsen's, and Clark's ideas regarding the early-stage adaptations of both novels. Secondly, I will address Hoffman's, Lloyd's, and Skiles's assumptions on the modern stage-adaptations of both *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*. An overview of these theatre adaptations can help to better understand the historical and literary contextualization of the selected plays, as they can be compared among themselves.

Concerning the early-stage adaptations, Patsy Stoneman's essay *Inside Out: Jane Eyre on the Victorian Stage* is essential to understand the previous stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. She considers the Victorian productions of *Jane Eyre* were totally configured according to their target audiences and that each adaptation is different from each other. The first two plays were addressed to the London working class of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the last ones to the upper-middle class. Thus, John Courtney's *Jane Eyre or The Secrets of Thornfield Manor* (1848) offers a great variety of servants as characters, tackling their oppression and frustrations. Helpers are compared with orphans, being considered as similar victims (such as Jane Eyre). John Brougham's *Jane Eyre* (1849) also has a similar aim, as it mocks the aristocracy and their nonsense. Regarding the upper-middle class versions, Charlotte Birch Pfeiffer's *Jane Eyre or The Orphan of Lowood* (1870) focuses on the indignation caused by the mistreatment to orphans. Besides, Jane Eyre is portrayed as a person who needs protection throughout her whole life, namely from a man. Rochester is depicted as an angelic person so that he can be presented as the perfect 'saviour', free of any charge about Bertha Mason. The feminist sense of the novel is absolutely lost. Nonetheless, James Willing's *Jane Eyre or Poor Relations* (1879) criticises Rochester's behaviour, and Jane is described as an oppressed woman who detests marriage, so this dramatization keeps a feminist sense (Stoneman). The reason for this feminist approach can be found in the influence of the historical context of the play: the play was written when 'The Women's Revolt' took place, a social campaign to fight the unjust treatment to women regarding STD in the legislation by 1882.

Veronika Larsen also analyses early-stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* in *Promiscuity Instead of Inherited Insanity: Jane Eyre's Bertha in Early-Stage Adaptations*, focusing on the portrayal of Bertha Mason in these adaptations.

Larsen argues that this character is depicted as a promiscuous woman rather than an insane one, and, as previously stated, Rochester is idealised. After an overview of the first adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*, I will address the modern stage adaptations of both novels. Regarding Marian De Forest's first adaptation of *Little Women* in 1912, it is reviewed by Beverly Lyon Clark, whose ideas have already been considered in the section 1.4.2.

As for the modern adaptations, Lloyd Evans and Wayne Hoffman are highlighted due to their positions as theatre critics in British and American newspapers, respectively, such as *The Spectator Limited*, *Billboard*, etc. They have recently offered several reviews on modern stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* in these Anglo-Saxon newspapers. Concerning one of the modern adaptations of *Jane Eyre* (1995), by John Caird, it omits important topics of the novel, such as the religious faith or the women's self-determination, focusing on the omnipotent force of love (Hoffman). Nick Lane's and Adrian McDougall's modern adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (2020) depicts both Jane and masculine characters in a more compassionate way. Jane's characterization is released from any feature of radical feminism and men are not portrayed as oppressors. These plays have been conceived in a current cultural context in which religion has less weight and feminist ideas can be sometimes too extreme due to several considerations of the fourth feminist wave.

However, according to Meghan Skiles, other modern dramatisations support a strong feminist approach, proof of the shifting paradigm of feminism nowadays. A good example is Allan Knee's *Little Women Broadway Musical* (2005), as Jo March is depicted as a strong, independent, and self-determined woman.

Thus, it is possible to infer that there is not a clear feminist trend linked to each period of adaptations - it could be easy to imagine that all the adaptations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be less feminist than all the modern ones, but it is not the case. With respect to the early adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, Courtney's, Brougham's, and Willing's adaptations are more subversive, whereas Pfeiffer's is more traditional. De Forest's adaptation of *Little Women* is also considered as a light feminist adaptation. Concerning the modern adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, Caird's as well as Lane's and McDougall's plays omit important feminist concepts, whereas Knee's adaptation has a strong feminist approach. Thus, following

Hutcheon's and O'Flynn's theory, I can observe how the temporal context, the 'When', is not such a significant influence on the adaptations. It seems that other concepts such as the 'Who?', 'Why?' and 'How' play a more important role instead - both the adapters, their main reasons and the features of the audience seem to be the ones that really shape the ideological approach of a stage adaptation.

Following the overview of these adaptations some conclusions can be drawn. As to the early-stage adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*, they are dated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are considered traditional and conservative versions of the novels by the critics Patsy Stoneman, Veronika Larsen, and Beverly Lyon Clark. According to Wayne Hoffman, Evans Lloyd, and Meghan Skiles, the modern-stage adaptations of both novels, dated in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are regarded as more feminist and reformist plays than their predecessors.

## **2. Analysis of the Selected Plays**

The previous analysis of these plays will allow me to better understand the literary context of the selected theatre adaptations. Thus, this analysis will allow me to compare the selected adaptations to previous adaptations to look for a historical evolution. After the previous considerations, a deeper study of the selected adaptations will be developed below. First, Marian De Forest's play *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts* will be approached, and later, Jay Richards' adaptation *Jane Eyre – A New Musical*. A chronological order has been followed to better contextualise the theatre adaptations.

### **2.1. Analysis of *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts***

With the goal to scrutinise the feminist approach of this adaptation in comparison with the novel, this study has been divided into four sections. First, I will explore the context, in which an analysis on the historic and literary context will be provided. Secondly, I will investigate the similarities and differences between the novels and the selected adaptations. In the third section the possible construction of the different characters according to feminist influences will be examined. Finally, the last section will deal with the key issues of the adaptation, in which controversial aspects according to feminist theories such as

motherhood, marriage, private/public sphere, and gender identity will be reviewed.

### 2.1.1. The Context

When approaching this section, I will address first the historical context. Later, I will explain the literary context. I will offer the perspective of both the novel and the stage adaptation.

Alcott's *Little Women* introduces the reader in the latter days of the American Civil War, a conflict that took part between the northern and southern states from 1861 to 1865 due to the abolition of slavery. The March girls' father is fighting in the war, a similar destiny of other readers' fathers at the time, as almost every family had a member involved in the conflict in some way. It is also essential to highlight that the events of the novel also happen during the Gilded Age, a time of American history in which scientific innovation, industrialization, and social justice bloomed. Moreover, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a high number of ideals of femininity were prevalent in that time, as can be seen in *Searchlights on Health: Light on Dark Corners: A Complete Sexual Science and a Guide to Purity and Physical Manhood, Advice To Maiden, Wife, And Mother, Love, Courtship, And Marriage* (James Lawrence Nichols and Benjamin Grant Jefferis), published in 1895. Here, the authors describe what men should look for in a bride:

'Do you love her because she is a thoroughly womanly woman; for her tender sympathetic nature; for the jewels of her life, which are absolute purity of mind and heart; for the sweet sincerity of her disposition; for her loving, charitable thought; for her strength of character? because she is pitiful to the sinful, tender to the sorrowful, capable, self-reliant, modest, true-hearted? in brief, because she is the embodiment of all womanly virtues?' (134).

Consequently, women were forced to embody these feminine virtues to fit into society. Certain authors in the late nineteenth century, and specially Louisa May Alcott and other feminists, questioned these traditional notions and proposed other ideas about how women should behave and which roles they may have in society. Thus, feminism appeared during this time and, as a result, the first feminist ideas can be read through the pages of *Little Women*.

Regarding the historical context of Marian de Forest's stage adaptation, which was published in 1912, it is interesting to highlight the main hallmarks of

those years – it's the time of socialism, industrialization, imperialism, and WWI. Furthermore, feminism gained strength and, consequently, the first feminist wave arose. It gave way to the 'New Woman', based on a new female identity and whose new roles could be shared with those of men. Consequently, some legal changes took place, such as The Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, which were the ending of the 'coverture' system. This new concept of femininity was also reflected on several social developments, such as the invention of the bicycle, whereby women gained movement freedom and independence; the increasing disuse of gender clothes, such as tight corsets and high heels; and the disappearance of public spaces for reputable women, such as the tearooms.

With respect to the literary context, the novel of *Little Women* belongs to both the Romantic and the Transcendentalist literary periods. Romanticism was characterised by its emphasis on emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. Proof of the Romantic traces of the novel is its high sentimentalism, which will be deeply discussed later. The Romantic movement gave rise to New England Transcendentalism, a philosophy which presented a different portrayal of the self. Emerson, Thoreau and Hawthorn, famous American thinkers, were both Alcott's family friends and promoters of the Transcendentalist movement under the slogan 'plain living and high thinking'. Therefore, Alcott was especially influenced by this literary philosophy. It focused on the assumption that people are at their best when truly self-reliant and independent, which can be clearly reflected on the character of Jo as well as other feminist characters. Transcendentalists also saw divine experience inherent in the daily life, so Alcott's novel deals with everyday familiar events.

The literary context of Marian De Forest's stage adaptation is related to movements with a closer link with theatre. Thus, both Melodrama and Realism shape her work. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Melodrama was present in the Western theatre. This type of plays show dialogues that are excessively sentimental or bombastic, instead of action. Characters are conceived to fulfil stereotypes and are often flat. Besides, melodramas take place in the private sphere of the home, as can be seen in the main scenery of the adaptation – the living room. These dramas also focus on family or morality issues, as well as on love and marriage, which can be found in the dialogues of De Forest's characters. But the typical melodrama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century will be supplanted by the realist movement at the

beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its goal is to create ordinary characters, that is, they are neither idealised nor stereotyped. De Forest's characters follow this pattern, which will be discussed later. The language is simple and informal, as it aims to represent reality just as it is. The usual themes are related to everyday life as well as to social problems and human weaknesses, which can be found in the daily events of De Forest's play. The scenery lacks details, as it can be seen in the living room, the main setting of the play. Realist movement also tries to show social injustices and the truth, albeit De Forest's aim is slightly different, as will be discussed below. Besides, it is also interesting to mention other Broadway plays which were premiered at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the USA, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1912), which opened a few days later than the theatre adaptation of *Little Women*, and *Treasure Island* (1915).

Concluding this section, the historical context of both plays differs. The novel was written in 1868 and based on the 1860s, during the American Civil War and the Gilded Age, when feminism had not been born yet; whilst De Forest's adaptation was created at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when industrialization, imperialism, and WWI were prevalent, as well as the first feminist changes in society and laws. Concerning the literary context, the novel of *Little Women* belongs to both the Romantic literary period (which focused on emotion) and the Transcendentalist one (which presented a plain, self-reliant, and independent portrayal of the self), whereas the stage adaptation is linked to the transition between Melodrama (which was based on sentimental dialogues, flat characters, romantic themes, and domestic sceneries) and Realism (which offered ordinary characters, a simple language, themes of everyday life, and plain sets).

### **2.1.2. The Adaptation**

To begin with, it is essential to introduce the adaptation. *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts* was written by Marian de Forest in 1912. She became famous for her stage adaptation and played an important role in the feminist movement, funding an organisation for women, Zonta. The analysis of her adaptation will be provided next.

Firstly, I will review the concept of 'what'. As it is a play adapted from a novel, the plot must be reduced inevitably. However, this condensation has not

been considered a positive aspect by many critics, as it does not portray a powerful or direct feminist message but everything the opposite.

Following Meghan Skiles' review of this adaptation, she considers that critics of that time perceived the play as a marvellous masterpiece, which exposed the great nature of drama. Nonetheless, there are other critics who differ, such as Henry Taylor Parker. He was an essential theatre critic at the beginning of the 20th century in the USA whose review is deeply analysed by Beverly Lyon Clark. According to his perspective, the critics of that time perceived that De Forest's adaptation had transformed the novel into a sentimental domestic idyll. Thus, even though there are certain features that both works share, there are also other aspects in which they differ.

Which were the main similarities between this stage adaptation and the original book? De Forest's adaptation retains many of Alcott's ideas and dialogues, such as the moments when the sisters rehearse a theatre play, their father comes back home after the Civil War, Jo cuts her hair, Beth dies, or the March girls start dating boys. Thus, these similarities keep the main events from the novel in the plot.

With respect to the differences, first I will explain the elements that De Forest shapes in her own way. Secondly, I will describe the significance of the concepts of sentiment and sentimentalism in this play. Thirdly, I will explore why this work is a multiple adaptation. Later, I will analyse the main goal of this theatre adaptation. Lastly, I will focus on the role of the audience at the time of influencing this stage adaptation.

As for the different elements that De Forest's adaptation includes, she downplays the physical appearance of the girls as well as their moral sacrifices – Jo has her hair cut, e.g., but her hair is the result of a dramatic expression of her impulsiveness. Besides, De Forest foregrounds more the characters' romances than Alcott, which will be deeper discussed in the 'Marriage' section.

It is also interesting to explore why the concepts of sentiment and sentimentality were so broadly discussed by the critics who attended the performance in the time. Sentimentalism had been conceived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a feeling based on the human concern for others. However, it was later transformed into the trend to concentrate caring into the narrow confines of middle-class families. Thus, sensitivity accumulated a great number of negative

connotations - as a response to an increasing connexion between this concept and women as well as the moments in which the discursive processes that construct emotions become visible. Certain purist critics of the time, such as the London theatre critic A. B. Walkley, declare that the play contains too much sentiment and lacks story as well as dramatic moments, as it is considered as a succession of 'tableaux vivants' with dialogues. It depicts scenes of the daily life of the March family in the Concord of the 1860s. A familiar moment is followed by another, with small anecdotes between them. These critics denounce this *Little Women* adaptation has become a kind of gooey sugarplum.

Nonetheless, Parker accepts the existence of sentimentalism and emotions in the adaptation, as he thinks it is the gist of the novel – Alcott's sentimentality was inspired by her own girlhood, revisiting her memories from her family in that time. Thus, Clark also normalises the (excessive) presence of sentiment in the play, as it already existed in the original source text. Moreover, she also reflects on the human nature and how sentimentality is an essential feature of it, so it should not be ignored. Consequently, both Parker and Clark oppose those Puritan critics who claim that the adaptation is too sentimental and that had transformed the novel into a different text. Parker and Clark conclude that sentimentality is the true essence of *Little Women*, so it is inconceivable without it.

Furthermore, Parker also conceives De Forest's play as a multiple adaptation - given that the novel was an adaptation of Alcott's girlhood and family, it was also adapted by Marian De Forest and several actors and actresses on stage, and it was eventually expressed through the audience's emotions and tears.

Moreover, Parker and Clark also claim that the final goal of De Forest's stage adaptation is not the evocation of reform, but the re-enactment of an atmosphere of tradition and domesticity. Unlike Louise May Alcott, who was a convinced advocate for the women's suffrage and addressed these ideas in her novel, Marian De Forest prefers to include elements that are more in tune with her audience's preferences. For many American youths of that time, the novel represented a young America - it offered a reminiscent look at a traditional past and a simpler life, in which women were domestic and did not want to be independent. Many newspapers and media of that time reflect indeed this

perspective, associating the novel with self-sacrifice, tradition, and domesticity. Thus, De Forest's goal was to offer her audience a play adapted to their personal taste, instead of to make them think seriously about women's social roles.

Secondly, I will address the idea of 'who'. We can distinguish, on the one hand, the author, that is, Louisa May Alcott, and, on the other hand, the adapter, Marian de Forest. Bessie Bonstelle was the director, who convinced the theatre manager William A. Brady to accept the play. Samuel French was the publisher in the USA, the UK, and Canada. Other figures such as composer or actors are not reflected on Marian de Forest's work. Marian de Forest's reasons behind her adaptation mainly comprise the economic lures, as she adapted her play to fit into the audience's general taste, forgetting part of Alcott's feminist approach and depicting a reminiscent and rural portrayal of the America of the Civil War.

Thirdly, I will explore the notion of 'How?', which explores different characteristics concerning audiences. —Concerning the contribution of the audience on De Forest's stage adaptation, both Henry Taylor Parker and Linda Hutcheon highlight and recognize potential spectators' power to influence on the adapter so that the adaptation differ from the original work. Parker's opinion is an innovative perspective, as many critics of his time value accuracy as a key concept when adapting original works. Besides, Hutcheon considers the relevance of creativity when it comes to interpreting a text to adapt it. This is a moment in which the audience also takes part in by negotiating the meaning of the adaptation in an innovative way. Furthermore, both Parker and Hutcheon also accept that the original novel exerts a great influence over the stage adaptation, as the public ask for it. Parker accepts this fact, albeit he does not include himself among the 99% of the audience who wish a totally accurate adaptation - he simply does not judge the adaptation according to accuracy criteria. Both Hutcheon and he recognise that the audience expect as many echoes from Alcott's novel as possible, so they guess that the meaning of the adaptation will be constructed according to it.

Furthermore, regarding Sue-Ellen Case's approach of the relation between different feminist trends and theatre, it is essential to remark the role that radical feminism plays in this work. Radical feminism can be read as a feminist trend that aims to take part in political change and extreme actions, as radical feminists think that the main source of women's oppression is the

patriarchal system, which is rooted in our society since so many centuries. Thus, under the light of this perspective, Marian de Forest's adaptation is the opposite of what radical feminist ideas represent because it perpetuates certain sexist concepts, e.g., the domestic portrayal of Jo March, and does not offer a new social system where supremacist masculinities are erased. Thus, radical feminists would consider that this play is neither a proper feminist play nor a tool to fight the oppression that patriarchy represents for women. As a result, the most appropriate feminist trend for the analysis of this adaptation would be the personal theatre. Following this perspective, the selected adaptation aims to recover the female experience and personal voice of Jo March (although with certain domestic nuances) along with a discussion of certain events, such as the American Civil War.

I will eventually include an analysis on the ideas of 'Where?' and 'When?', which are closely linked to how spatial and temporal context can affect an adaptation. As it has previously been remarked, although Marian de Forest based her play on the same spatial context than Alcott (Concord, Massachusetts, USA), she did transform certain nuances related to temporal context. As most of her audience longed for an idealised rural past, she focused on a reminiscent portrayal of a traditional country immersed in the Civil War, when modernity and new social ideas regarding women had not disturbed the habitual way of life yet.

The conclusive remarks of this section show that Marian de Forest based on a feminist novel to create her adaptation, although the perspective of the play was less radical regarding feminism. With the aim of having commercial success, she conceived an adaptation of *Little Women* which focused on what the audience missed, that is, a reminiscent perspective of the rural America prior to the Civil War, when society was 'quieter' before the feminist movement started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **2.1.3. The Characters**

Following Parker's and Clark's ideas, I will also analyse the characterisation when it comes to Alcott's novel and De Forest's stage adaptation. Firstly, I will depict the main aspects that both works share, and later, I will address the elements in which they differ.

Regarding the main similarities between both texts, I will explore firstly the shared diversity of characters. Secondly, I will review how the actors and actresses of the play were influenced by the novel. Lastly, I will explain Jo's independent personality in both texts.

Firstly, Parker and Clark claim that the stage adaptation and the book have two great qualities that make them stand out – an extensive quantity of characters and a rich atmosphere. Regarding the former, many people find it easy to relate to them as they can remind us to our father, mother, and so on. Besides, the main feminine characters are types of girls who are atemporal and could even be real, so even girls of today can empathise with them. Clark compares the main feminine characters with girls in real life – Beth's speech in the book and in the play is pretty similar to a girl who lives in the modern society; Amy goes in and out of the shops in Tremont street in a similar way than any other modern girl; Meg is wooed and won often by boys such as John Brooke; Jo uplifts everyone with her pamphlets, a form of atypical self-expression in her time and environment that could be shared by girls of today who enjoy writing or denouncing social matters.

Besides, most actors had preconceptions on their stage roles because they had already read the book. Consequently, they represented the outer layer of their characters and added their own light and shadow to their performances.

With respect to Jo's personality, she is greatly shaped by the Transcendentalism of her time. Both Alcott's and De Forest's Jo are independent and atypical due to the transcendental ideas of her father. Despite Jo's singular characterisation, the critics of the time attribute the March family's modernity to a 'pantheon of men' - that is, the transcendentalists Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorn - instead of to the portrayal of Jo.

As for the differences between both texts, several aspects will be approached. Firstly, I will consider how the main character, Jo March, is portrayed in different ways in the novel and in the adaptation. Secondly, I will address the domestication and subordination of De Forest's women. Thirdly, I will describe how the character of Laurie is differently portrayed in the stage adaptation. Later, I will reflect on the evolution of the characters. Then, I will explore the relation between the development of the characters in the play and several theatre

movements of the time. Lastly, I will analyse the absence of boundaries between the actors and the audience.

Concerning the portrayal of Jo March, De Forest does not represent her as a reformist in her stage adaptation, unlike Alcott in her novel. However, Parker suggests that the Jo of the theatre adaptation could be like this in the future due to her necessity of self-expression. Similarly, Parker recognizes that Jo's role as a writer is downplayed in De Forest's work.

However, Clark remarks that neither Parker nor other critics of the time realise to what extent De Forest's women are domesticated and subordinated. Despite this, Parker is sensitive to a certain extent to women's problems in their daily life and rejects any external validation coming from men – whether transcendental or not.

Besides Jo, Laurie is also another character who suffers certain modifications in De Forest's adaptation. His physical appearance, as well as his speech and manners, greatly differ from those of the novel.

Moreover, the evolution of the characters is slightly different in the theatre adaptation. Specially, Amy matures a lot but based on the 'traditional' De Forest's Jo, who not only is more tolerant with others' ways of life and points of view but she also claims different values than Alcott's Jo. Nonetheless, Parker sings the praises of this characterisation unfolding.

This singular development of the characters in the theatre adaptation is influenced, on the one hand, by the emerging realism in the Western theatre at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It aimed to portray the personality of common people to approach the audience, who recognised their lives on stage. On the other hand, another key literary influence of the time is the melodrama, in which characters are represented as 'types', unlike realism. Parker compliments this characterisation technique and extrapolates these 'types' to real people. But why are there two opposite characterisation techniques in De Forest's adaptation? Because it is a play in which the typical melodrama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was being slowly supplanted by the new realist movement. Thus, Parker analyses the adaptation according to both perspectives, recognising the existence of two types of audiences.

Regarding the perception of the characters in the theatre adaptation, it is essential to explore the influence of the stage as well as the actors and actresses

on it. Parker suggests that the theatre enables the absence of boundaries between the players and the spectators, as if the characters could position themselves and move among the audience, clasping their hands with them as old friends. Characters become close and beloved people. Thus, the theatre structure disappears in the minds of the audience because of their familiarity with Alcott's novel and the realism of the play.

As conclusion, it is important to remark that the characterisation of the main character of the story, Jo March, is portrayed differently in the theatre adaptation. Marian de Forest conceived a less radical and reformist Jo, as she is more tolerant with others' ways of life and points of view and claims different values than Alcott's Jo. Her career as a writer is downplayed too. Furthermore, most feminine characters seem to be subordinated.

#### **2.1.4. Key Issues**

After an in-depth analysis of Marian De Forest's historic and literary context, her stage adaptation, and its characters, I can explain how this adapter constructs the moral values related to women's lives. Not only will I tackle marriage but I also will review private/public sphere, gender identity and motherhood. To accomplish this task, I will compare Alcott's point of view with De Forest's perspective regarding each matter.

##### **2.1.4.1. Marriage**

In the novel, Alcott offers a mixed perspective on marriage. On the one hand, the importance of men in women's lives is questioned from the beginning. Mr March is off because he has volunteered to fight in the Civil War, so the March girls are left to their own devices. Although they find a second father in Mr Laurence, Alcott considers that women do not need any men to get by in life, unlike what social norms of the time suggest. However, on the other hand, there is an interesting debate on the different choices when it comes to marriage. Meg marries Mr Brooke, as her true dream is to be a wife and a mother, whereas Jo rejects marriage constrictions and strives to be an independent woman. Meg explains her that her traditional dreams are as important as hers, although they are different. Thus, according to Mark Fortier, Meg offers with this dialogue an excellent example of deconstruction, as she explains that there is not a single

way to approach marriage. She is pushing the matter to the limits, facing even certain contradictions that are perceived by Jo. Besides, Mrs March is eager to see each of her daughters married well (though she does mention that it would be equally acceptable if they remained single). Moreover, the use of umbrellas in romantic scenes as a symbol of masculine protectiveness mellows the feminist ideology of the novel.

As was previously discussed in the section 2.1.2., De Forest foregrounds more the characters' romances than Alcott. Marmee, the March girls' mother, has recurrent dialogues related to the relation between happiness and marriage, for instance. Nonetheless, she does not pronounce feminist sentences as the Marmee of the novel does, such as 'better be happy old maids than unhappy wives' (Alcott, 13).

#### **2.1.4.2. Private/Public Sphere**

Alcott raises the question about whether women should belong only to the domestic field. Following the many moneymaking exploits of Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy, the author calls into question the assumption that women's realm is the domestic sphere - this was often referred to as the 'Cult of Domesticity' -. Jo, e.g., tries to earn a living as a writer, a role which is inspired by Alcott's experience, whereas Meg would like to be an actress, Amy a famous painter in Paris, and Beth a musician. However, all of them go through hardships when it comes to chasing their professional dreams because of their condition of women. They are expected to get married and raise their children, especially those with low-income.

Regarding the stage adaptation, Marian de Forest partially omits Jo's career as a writer. She does not specify whether her Jo publishes her book, whereas Professor Bhaer is a renowned author (unlike Alcott's one). He is the famous writer, and Jo, his muse. Thus, Marian de Forest is not especially interested in spreading the different professional possibilities that women could have apart from staying at home doing the housework and looking after their children.

#### **2.1.4.3. Gender Identity**

The notion of what constitutes true feminine identity is continuously interrogated as a first attempt to deconstruct the gender construct. Alcott's Jo is the antithesis of the feminine virtue – not only does she reject to wear corsets and does prefer to parade around the March household in a pair of leather boots, but she also pursues her dream to become a successful writer penning poems and romances by the dozen. She has been even defined sometimes as gender-bender, a queer person who reveals against gender stereotypes and the binary system established by them. The fact that the reader realises that Jo is successful despite her lack of conventional feminine traits reveals a radical assumption that there are many ways to be a woman, and that no one is better than the other. However, this revolutionary idea does not imply that all the March women are portrayed in opposition to the traditional canons of femininity. All the sisters unless Jo strive to be considered as femininity standards, embodying conventional ideals of virtue and beauty. Following this contrast, Alcott tries to show how women are complex beings, who can either adapt to the patriarchal gender roles or reject them and construct new identities according to their personal preferences.

Nonetheless, De Forest's feminine characters embody a more conventional canon of womanhood. Both Parker and Clark claim that De Forest's Jo is 'more tolerant of others' way of life and others' point of view, with a finer sense of the values of living and more zest for its pleasures because she had known some of its young pains, is as clear and consistent an 'evolution of character' as the sternest young Puritan of the theatre could demand' (8).

#### **2.1.4.4. Motherhood**

Motherhood is a recurrent theme in the novel along with marriage, and Alcott reflects on it offering several points of view. For example, the debate between Jo and Meg when the latter marries Mr Brooke and longs to be a good mother is an interesting situation that offers two personal options – to find happiness in either family or self-fulfilment as an independent woman. Mrs March also seems to support Meg's motherly perspective, as she comments at the end of the novel that there is no greater happiness than to experience her family's love. She tries to gather her children and grandchildren with her open arms,

motherly expressing a deep gratitude and happiness – ‘Oh, my girls, however long you may live, I never can wish you a greater happiness than this!’ (861).

As to the motherly roles in Marian de Forest’s theatre adaptation, her approach seems to be similar to Alcott’s one. In the last page of the script, the adapter also includes Mrs March’s sentence about the happiness and gratitude she feels due to her family. Besides, Amy also jokes in the play with Hannah about the perspective of Meg as a mother and Marmee as a grandmother after the first’s wedding. Thus, the expectations that young girls had were closely related to experiencing maternity. Consequently, it can be observed that Marian de Forest’s approach does not defy the patriarchal system regarding maternity.

Concluding the section ‘Key issues’ of the adaptation of *Little Women*, a few remarks can be made. With respect to marriage, Meg’s and Jo’s debate on the decision of getting married in the novel contrasts with De Forest’s emphasis on more plain aspects, such as the characters’ romances. As to the domestic/public sphere, Alcott raises the question about whether women should belong only to the domestic field, whilst Marian de Forest partially omits Jo’s career as a writer. Regarding gender identity, Alcott’s Jo is the antithesis of the feminine virtue (both in her physical appearance and her personality), whilst De Forest’s Jo is more tolerant of others’ way of life. Finally, the issue of motherhood is represented in the novel offering several points of view (both a traditional one and a feminist one), whereas Marian de Forest’s approach does not fight against the patriarchy when it comes to maternity.

## **2.2. Analysis of *Jane Eyre – A New Musical***

To explore the feminist perspective of Jay Richards’ stage adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, I will provide an analysis whose structure is divided into four sections – in a similar way to the previous considerations on Marian de Forest’s theatre adaptation of *Little Women*: the context, the adaptation, the characters, and key issues.

### **2.2.1. The Context**

The examination of the context of Richards’ adaptation requires a closer look, first, at the historic context and, secondly, the literary context. To revise them I will offer the perspective of both the novel and the stage adaptation.

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is based on the Victorian age, which brought crises and progress across society in the UK and were reviewed by writers like Brontë. Moreover, the country became a huge empire through their countless colonies, which brought a huge wealth to the Britons. Along with the Industrial Revolution manufacturing incomes, the UK transformed into a great economic power. The middle class thrived through new lucrative opportunities, whereas a new labouring class strived for getting better living and working conditions. Brontë's novel includes a representation of the different changes and complaints of the society in that period: adequate working conditions, as well as a better education. Nonetheless, most reforms were addressed to men, as women had a secondary position in the Victorian society. Thus, Brontë also reflects on the gender roles and class issues that British women suffered in this age.

As to the historical context of Richards' stage adaptation, it must be remarked that the play premiered in 2013 at the Ellen Eccles Theatre, Logan UT, USA. At this time, feminism had already gone through several waves and was immersed in the fourth one, which is linked to social media and a reconnection with many second-wave debates. This is a symptom of postmodernism. For instance, regarding the sexed body, female empowerment includes sexual or body exposure in an assertive way, such as Beyoncé or Shakira. But this produces that their bodies are used again by capitalism to make money using them as edible objects. Concerning the sexual identity, the fourth wave is characterised by the mainstream of gay and transexual lives, e.g., the legalisation of gay marriages or the integration of transexual celebrities in the public eye. This also influences on literature, as it is so mainstream that it is not even a plot or genre on its own. Besides, a new concept emerges: 'genderqueer', that is, neither masculine nor feminine. As for ethnicity, there is a higher number of books written by women from developing countries following a greater education access.

With respect to the literary context of Brontë's work, it is considered a Victorian novel. These works used to include gothic elements, such as an environment of fear, the threat of supernatural events, the intrusion of the past upon the present, and the use of medieval buildings (with dungeons and hidden passages) as the stories setting. The novel reflects these aspects through the mysterious and hidden story of Bertha Mason (which seems to be a ghost story due to the strange laughter that echoes in the house at the beginning of the book)

and Thornfield Hall, the manor where most of the plot takes place in. Besides, Charlotte Brontë is also considered as one of the creators of the Female Gothic, which introduced female societal desires and a persecuted heroine. Jane Eyre represents this role, who strives for being an independent woman. Secondly, the novel also includes a romantic marriage plot, as Female Gothic works also dealt with women's problems related to patriarchal society, such as her fears of entrapment in the domestic sphere, marriage, childbirth, domestic abuse, or the female body. Jane Eyre reflects deeply on these themes, and rebels steadily against them. Thirdly, Brontë's work also is a coming-of-age story, that is, a *Bildungsroman*-like plot sequence, which allows the characters -and the readers- to grow from adolescence to maturity. At the beginning of the novel, Jane Eyre is a child, but her evolution throughout the novel allows the reader to appreciate her spiritual development until she becomes a woman.

Concerning the literary context of Richards' theatre adaptation, it is important to mention that this play is also a musical. This type of drama is certainly one of the most popular and interesting genres of American theatre, as it has been influenced by the necessities of a theatre system that has been created in a democracy. This means that it should be a genre for everyone – both the intellectual and the common man. The musicals of the 2010s included a high number of surprises and their plots were often based on other works, especially books, movies, and music albums. The most relevant musicals of the decade in the USA were *Memphis* (2010) and *Matilda the Musical* (2013), whereas *The Lion King* (1997) or *Anastasia* (2017) are some of the most famous in Europe (1997). Richards' adaptation is not only a musical but also a feminist drama. According to Noelle Janaczewska's work, it can be observed that the feminist British drama has managed to survive following the contribution of certain adapters, such as Jay Richards, and despite the prevailing influence of Margaret Thatcher's conservatism of the 80s and the social realism in theatre.

As conclusion, it is essential to make a few remarks on the historical and literary context of both works. Regarding the former, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was written during the Victorian age (with the colonial empire and the Industrial Revolution as the main hallmarks of that time), whilst Richards' adaptation was conceived in the fourth feminist wave (which is linked to social media and a reconnection with many second-wave debates, that is, postmodernism).

Concerning the literary context of Brontë's work, it is considered a Victorian novel, a Female Gothic story, and a 'Bildungsroman'. Richards' adaptation is mainly a musical, which was created during a period of democracy (as a result, it is a genre for everyone – both the intellectual and the common man).

### 2.2.2. The Adaptation

To start with, it is important to introduce the adaptation. *Jane Eyre – A New Musical* was written by Jay Richards in 2013. He's a known adapter of literary classics, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women*, creating commercially successful stage adaptations. Besides, he tends to include music in his plays, so they also can be considered musicals, as it is the case of his adaptation of *Jane Eyre – A New Musical*. The analysis of the selected adaptation will be provided next.

Firstly, I will reflect on the notion of 'What'. It requires a revisit of the forms of the medium. Just like Marian de Forest's *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts*, Jay Richards' *Jane Eyre – A New Musical* is a play adapted from a novel, so the size of the drama was reduced inevitably. Nonetheless, Richards' adaptation is considered a positive cutting, as he manages to convey a powerful message representing the most important parts of the book without forgetting the feminist approach – and he even includes new ideas and dialogues with certain feminist nuances (as will be deeply explained in the section 2.2.3. 'The characters').

Following the premiere of Richards' production at the Ellen Eccles Theatre (Logan, USA), certain similarities and differences between it and Brontë's novel regarding feminism have been observed. Similarities will be reviewed next, paying attention to which aspects on sexism and classism are common in the novel and in the play.

As to sexism, both Brontë's work and Richards' adaptation deal with a generalised patriarchal system. Not only is it maintained by gentlemen, but it also is kept by servants, for example, as every maid and helper hide Bertha Mason's existence. In 19th-century England, gender roles strongly influenced people's behaviour and identities, and women endured condescending attitudes about a woman's place, intelligence, and voice. Nonetheless, this topic will be further explored in detail in section 2.2.3 following a close analysis of each character.

Classism is another topic that both works share. Marriages of convenience, like the one between Rochester and Mrs. Ingram, are an important part of both plots. Here, class and sexism intertwine, as life in 19th-century Britain was governed by social class, and people typically stayed in the class into which they were born. That is why in both Brontë's novel and Richards' play Mrs Fairfax warns Jane to be careful with Rochester's proposal since gentlemen are not used to marry governesses. Jane's social mobility lets the authors create a vast social landscape where they examine the sources and consequences of class boundaries.

I will also approach the differences between the novel and the theatre adaptation regarding sexism, classism, feminism, and style. This analysis will provide a closer look at Richards' perspective concerning his adaptation.

About how sexism issues are portrayed differently, it is essential to remark the red room. It symbolises how society traps Jane by limiting her freedom due to her class, gender, and independent streak. It appears in the novel, whilst in the play it is omitted. Besides, the role of Bertha Mason is barely mentioned in the stage adaptation (only when she is discovered following a relative's comment in Jane's and Rochester's wedding), whereas Brontë offers a thorough portrayal of this character's story. Thus, we could infer that Richards preferred to omit symbols related to sexism in his play.

When it comes to classism, Richards includes a wider approach on marriages of convenience, as his play also deals with this type of marriages between servants. In one of the songs, one of the maids claims that she longs to marry a wealthy gentleman instead of a simple lower-class man, such as a stable helper. Brontë did not write about this topic in her novel. Moreover, Richards' play does not explore Jane's evolution as a teacher at Lowood. But Brontë described how, after a typhus epidemic decimates the student population of the school and new management improves the conditions of Lowood, Jane flourishes under her newly considerate teachers and becomes a teacher herself after six years. Thus, following a new education system free of Mr. Rochester's classist ideas, Jane can improve her living conditions. As a result, Jay Richards is aware of the influence of Victorian class rules on the characters only in certain parts of his play.

Concerning feminism, Richards' adaptation comprises several aspects that are openly feminist and are not explored in the novel. To illustrate, the gardener teaches Adèle and Jane how to grow a flower. Besides, when doing this, Jane tells Adèle that she must learn to appreciate her inner beauty as a flower. Gardening was a predominantly male activity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so these dialogues could be seen as a ground-breaking part of the plot. A maid also criticises Mr Rochester in a song for confining Bertha Mason. After reviewing these considerations, it is possible to guess that Richards also has a feminist approach in his stage adaptation.

Style is also a field where Brontë and Richards differ. Whereas the first prefers to include a more serious tone, the latter's work has got some humorous dialogues, e.g., when Jane answers her aunt, Mrs. Reed, in a condescending manner.

Secondly, I will address the concepts of 'Who?' and 'Why?'. They require an analysis of who the adapter is and the main motives and difficulties concerning the adaptation. The original author is Charlotte Brontë, whilst the adapter is Jay Richards. He is also the composer since he has conceived the music and the lyrics of this musical. Actors are not detailed on his website. Regarding his motives behind this drama adaptation, the cultural capital could be the most relevant, as he focused on gaining respectability in terms of cultural cachet: Jay Richards considers himself a storyteller who aims to amplify the emotions he felt when he read this historical novel, as he affirmed in an interview for the Utah Public Radio. Thus, he wanted to become a known adapter of a literary classic.

Thirdly, I will explain the concept of 'How?' in this drama adaptation. This theoretical concept explores different characteristics concerning audiences. The appeal of adaptations for the public lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty. The triumph of successful adaptations lies in how they reinvent the familiar and make it fresh with certain variations. Each target audience has different preferences about the stories they want to see adapted, which must be considered in the adaptation process. In the case of Richards' adaptation, he introduces familiarity through a play which reproduces almost the same plot than Brontë's novel. Concerning novelty, it is achieved through the songs of the play, as it is a musical, and the omission of certain parts of the story.

I will eventually include a reflection on 'Where?' and 'When?' notions. They demand an overview of how spatial and temporal context can affect an adaptation. Despite the play has been performed in the USA, Richards has not modified the spatial context, as his drama adaptation still takes place in the UK. With respect to the temporal context, there are no modifications. His stage adaptation is also based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although it includes some new scenes and dialogues with feminist nuances that neither match this century nor appear in Brontë's novel, which will be discussed in section 2.2.4. 'Key Issues'.

A few concluding remarks show that Richards manages to convey a powerful message representing the most important parts of the book without forgetting the feminist approach – and he even includes new feminist ideas. However, he forgets to cover certain feminist symbols, such as the Red Room, as well as more details of Bertha's story. Concerning classism, Richards offers a wider approach on marriages of convenience, as his play also addresses this type of marriages between servants. With respect to the tone, Brontë prefers to include a more serious tone, whereas Richards' work has got some humorous dialogues.

### **2.2.3. The Characters**

A close analysis of the characterization of both works will allow me to explore several ideas that are worthy to be explained in detail. Firstly, I will approach the main similarities between them and, later, I will depict the aspects that they do not share.

On the one hand, I will depict how the main characters (Jane Eyre, Mr. Rochester, Bertha Mason, and St John Rivers) and the minor characters (John Reed, Mr Brocklehurst, Miss Temple, Helen Burns, Mrs Fairfax, and Miss Ingram) are similarly portrayed in both works.

Jane shows direct and honest dialogues in both the novel and the play, in which she rebels against Mrs Reed's, John Reed's and Mr Brocklehurst's injustices. She also confronts Mr Rochester's arrogance when he asks her if he is handsome, and she answers negatively. Besides, Jane's feminist ideology also appears when she initially thinks that Thornfield belongs to Mrs Fairfax (who is actually the housekeeper), as in the Victorian period gender roles prevented women to own properties. She is also portrayed as a resilient and strong woman

since she rescued Mr Rochester from the flames in Thornfield. Nonetheless, Jane also forgives his treatment towards Bertha Mason at the end of both works. Following Sharon Friedman, the whole reading of the character of Jane Eyre invites us to reflect on her complexity and captive passions. She is a character who longs for freedom, but at the same time, she is confined in her own way by the men of her life, who act as masters – from John Reed to Mr Brocklehurst, Mr Rochester and St John Reed. Besides, it is also essential to remark the dual function that Bertha Mason seems to have as a madwoman regarding Jane Eyre, which will be further explained in the section 2.2.4.3 'Gender identity'.

Brontë and Richards also include a dominant and sexist Mr Rochester, whose language is prepotent and condescending at the beginning of the story. To illustrate, when Mr. Rochester and Jane meet for the first time, she helps him with his sprain but also criticises his rude language. Besides, he also claims arrogantly that Adèle, his daughter, is not gifted. Rochester's language and manner identify him as a man accustomed to having power. Adèle is a living symbol of Rochester's past, which he wants to reform. But he will need Jane's help, symbolized in part by her role as Adèle's tutor. Nonetheless, as the story progresses, Rochester's character seems to mellow. To exemplify, after rejecting marrying Miss Ingram, he proposes Jane and tells her that they are equal, as well as agrees with her when she claims that she is an independent person.

Bertha Mason also is an interesting character in both works. After her history is revealed, Rochester, who has kept Bertha secretly confined, claims ironically to be a victim of families hiding their secrets. Rochester makes excuses for himself saying that it was his parents' idea due to Bertha Mason's wealth, and that he almost commits suicide because of his cohabitation with her. Bertha's nature is considered as violent and insane. However, there is a method to her madness: her violent nature is directed against those who held her captive, stealing her freedom and identity. Her rational mind has disappeared, and now she is all feeling. Besides, she is also characterised negatively because of prevailing prejudices against her West Indies origins and mixed-race background. Thus, racism issues of the Victorian period are also slightly mentioned in both the novel and the play. Moreover, both works also represent Tiina Rosenberg's ideas on the relation between the queer theory and post colonialist theory. She suggests that the West has a masculine role manipulating the passive and docile

East, which has a feminine role. In this case, the white character of Mr. Rochester has a dominant influence on the feminine characters of the novel and the play. The characters of both Jane Eyre and the feminine servants are dominated by him. But it is specially the character of Bertha Manson, who is black, the one who suffers the most the consequences of his behaviour.

As to John Rivers, he is a commanding male character in both the novel and the play. For example, it can be seen when Jane flees and arrives to her cousins' home, and one of the first questions that her cousin poses is whether she is married or not.

John Reed is also a living proof of how classism and sexism intertwine in both works. He treats Jane badly since she is an orphan girl. Because of this, the wealthy Reeds treat her as a dependent—someone who relies on their support. He and his mother treat her more like a servant than a family member.

Mr Brocklehurst is also a typical Victorian man in both works - sexist, dominant, and religious. It can be observed when he says in the play 'There's nothing so wicked as a naughty child... only a naughty little girl'. Besides, he also opposes Miss Temple when she tries to give more food to the girls of Lowood. He considers that they must go hungry, be cold and suffer poverty to feed their souls. Thus, the lack of food at Lowood reveals the cruelty of the school, as well as its religious hypocrisy and classist ideology. Food symbolizes generosity, nourishment, and bounty, and hunger symbolizes cruelty, lack of nourishment and spiritual suffering.

Unlike Mr Brocklehurst, Miss Temple is generous and compassionate with Jane and Helen Burns since she feeds them and treat them well. She is a symbol of sorority. Again, food and hunger are used to reveal how people treat each other — who is charitable, and who is not.

Helen Burns is also similar in Brontë's novel and Richards' stage adaptation. She is a calm and religious girl who forgives Mr Brocklehurst's sins. Religion could be read as a tool that men have to perpetuate the patriarchal system. Mrs Fairfax also contributes to maintain patriarchy in both works, as she helps Mr Rochester to hold Bertha Manson captive.

Following Miss Ingram's and her friends' comments in both works, a rooted classist ideology is promoted. They criticise governesses like Jane, who are considered as a martyrdom. It proves that she is not aware of the relevance of

sorority among women and that she is scared that Jane becomes a potential competitor for Mr Rochester's love.

On the other hand, I will explain the most relevant differences regarding characterization between Brontë's novel and Richards' play. Thus, I will approach Jane Eyre, Mr Rochester, Bertha Mason, St John Rivers (the main characters), Grace Poole, and Mr Briggs (some secondary characters).

Regarding Jane Eyre, Richards' adaptation does not include her drawings and dreams that do appear in the novel. She visualises through them her deepest feelings and creates symbols that describe her life. Thus, Jane's portraits stand in for people's characters and try to represent a new reality. For instance, Jane compares her own portraits of herself and Blanche Ingram, reflecting the differences between their personalities and class status. Besides, Jane has a dream in the novel that warns her to run from Thornfield at dawn, just after having uncovered Bertha Mason's truth. However, in the play her dream is omitted. Later, when Jane is alone and penniless in a region of England she does not know, the novel includes some pages in which Jane spends three days begging and nearly starving, whilst the play omits it. Furthermore, Jane Eyre discovers her uncle's hidden inheritance in the novel following her cousins, the Rivers, whereas in the play it is Mrs Reed who reveals the secret.

Jane is also portrayed differently when she rejects St John Rivers' proposal, as in the novel she suggests him first to go to India with him as his sister, and in the play, she answers negatively without hesitation. Besides, she defends Mr Rochester against St John Rivers in the stage adaptation (even after being aware of his treatment towards Bertha Manson), whilst the novel omits this detail. Already at the end of the novel, some pages include an account of how Jane and Mr Rochester marry, bring back Adèle from a boarding school, and have a son, as well as of how Mr Rochester regains his sight after the fire that Bertha had previously set. However, the play ends with a scene in which Jane forgives Mr Rochester and plans a future wedding.

Concerning Mr Rochester, the novel explains that after the fire that destroyed Thornfield Hall, he suffers injuries and loses his hand, but the play omits this detail, and he is only portrayed as a blind man.

Bertha Mason is an essential character in the plot of the novel, whereas she seems to be a nearly secondary character in the theatre adaptation. The

novel offers a detailed Bertha Mason's portrayal, as her story appears several times throughout the story. First, when Jane hears strange laughs in Thornfield; secondly, when the truth is revealed after Jane's and Mr. Rochester's wedding; and thirdly, when Bertha jumps from Thornfield roof and dies, after having destroyed the house through a fire that she had set in Jane's old bedroom. Nonetheless, the play omits the death of Bertha Manson as well as her accountability in the fire. Thus, according to Elaine Aston and her work on the influence of colonialist practices in the British theatre, Richards' position could be read as an attempt to omit and, consequently, marginalise, the Black women's identities regarding mainstream white (and feminist) theatre. It is also essential to include Sue-Ellen Case's ideas regarding the relation between the feminist trend that reflects on women of colour and the feminist approach of the play. She claims that there are racial and class privileges in the field of drama that privilege the white culture context. She highlights the secondary positions of both black women and Chicanas in the USA due to the historical practices of slavery and racism towards these ethnic communities. As Richards' play is an American play, this feminist trend could explain why the role of Bertha Manson is downplayed in the USA.

With respect of St John Rivers and his influence on Jane, it is worthy to mention his creation of a school where Jane works as a teacher. In the play, he says that he has created first a school for boys, and, later, a school for girls. This shows his sexist ideology and how he prefers to benefit boys first. However, the novel does not specify whether his school is single-sex or not. Furthermore, his dominant and religious ideas also appear when he aims to have a marriage of convenience with Jane. As a result, he proposes her, and Jane rejects him. In the novel, he has a more religious perspective, as he responds that in denying his proposal, she is denying the Christian faith. However, in the play, his position is rather sexist since he tells her that Jane's words are not feminine.

It is also essential to remark that Grace Poole does not appear in the stage adaptation, whereas in the novel she is a significant character. Here, her role is to look after Bertha Manson while she is confined in a room of Thornfield Hall. As a matter of fact, she is blamed by Mr Rochester when Bertha attacks his brother, Mr Mason.

Finally, Mr Briggs is another character who only appears in the novel. He is a lawyer who reveals Bertha Mason's existence together with Mr Mason in Jane's and Mr Rochester's wedding. First, it is Mr Briggs who declares that Mr Rochester already has a wife, and Mr Mason appears to confirm this. Nonetheless, the play only includes Mr Mason in this scene.

As conclusion, it can be said that the main similarities and differences between both works in terms of characters indicate a lower prominence of Bertha Mason. As a result, a mainstream feminist vision is provided by Richards, as he focuses only on the white character of Jane Eyre and omits the perspective of certain minorities' oppression, like the relation of colonialism and black women.

#### **2.2.4. Key Issues**

Once the context, the adaptation, and the characters of both Brontë's novel and Richards' theatre adaptation have been reviewed, I can provide a closer analysis of Richards' moral values construction regarding feminism. To do it, I will address marriage, private/public sphere, and gender identity, as well as motherhood. As it has already been approached in section 2.1.4., I will offer a comparison between the positions of the author of the original text (Brontë) and the adapter (Richards) in each matter.

##### **2.2.4.1. Marriage**

Jane's deepest desire is becoming independent and equal to men, as well as recognized for her personal qualities and own identity. Thus, Brontë addresses marriage as a social institution where women and men struggle for power. Therefore, Jane confronts several men who command women and do not consider them their equals, such as Mr Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St John. For instance, Jane not only does reject St. John's proposal of a loveless marriage, but she also faces Mr. Rochester when he communicates her that he is going to marry Miss Ingram and that he has found a governess vacancy for her in Ireland, as she perceives that he thinks he can transfer her as he wishes. Jane also detests the idea of a marriage without passion and love, and rebukes Mr Rochester for prioritizing social concerns ahead of his feelings for her. But Bertha Mason also plays an important role in the marriage topic since she is a radical symbol of how married women can be controlled and repressed.

As for the theatre adaptation, there are slight differences regarding the marriage institution, e.g., when Jane rejects John Rivers' proposal in the adaptation. Here, her attitude is more radical than in the novel because she rejects him without hesitation, instead of suggesting going to India with him as his sister. Nonetheless, Jane's answer to Mr Rochester's proposal does not include a condemnation for his initial ideas of getting married to Miss Ingram in the stage adaptation, that is, a loveless marriage. However, her subsequent answer is the same both in the novel and in the stage adaptation: she responds that she is equal to him and demands her independence. Mr Rochester also recognises it, although the tone of his sentences is slightly humorous. Moreover, the play lacks a deeper analysis or representation of Bertha's confining, as her presence disappears after her history is revealed at Jane's and Mr. Rochester's wedding. Thus, as it can be observed, Richards' position towards marriage maintains and even increases Brontë's feminist approach regarding Jane. Nonetheless, he omits the injustices suffered by Bertha Manson.

#### **2.2.4.2. Private/Public Sphere**

Despite Jane's desire to become an independent woman, she also seems to be confined to the domestic realm in most of the novel. Since she becomes a teacher at Lowood, her own home, she internalises her role as a woman who will oversee children. Later, she works as a governess in Thornfield Hall and her duties scarcely allow her to leave the manor. The only moment when she works outside a house is when she becomes a teacher at the school that St John Rivers has created. Besides, other women also belong to the private sphere in the novel, such as Mrs Fairfax or Bertha Manson. The first one is the housekeeper, a typical feminine role, as women used to do most housework at that time. The latter is Mr Rochester's forgotten wife, who is locked on the third floor of the house and is not even allowed to leave the house due to her supposed madness. She is the symbol of the reclusion that married women had to face to handle the chores in the Victorian period.

Concerning the play, some differences are worthy to be mentioned. For instance, her job as a teacher at Lowood does not appear in Richards' work. Later, when she arrives to Thornfield Hall, both the novel and the stage adaptation represent Jane's role similarly. After this, she flees and starts working

as a teacher again at St John Rivers' school, although Richards specifies that it is a single-school for girls, and that it includes some subjects related to the housework, such as sewing. Regarding Mrs Fairfax, both the novel and the play represent how Jane wonders if Thornfield Hall will belong to this woman, a very modern idea for the Victorian period. However, Mrs Fairfax supports Mr Rochester's plan about Bertha Mason in both works –as well as most servants do, contributing to maintain the patriarchy of the time. Despite this, there is a servant in Richards' play who denounces Bertha's confining. As a result, Richards aims to represent a Jane whose job as a teacher is not so relevant, which could be considered a feminist approach. He also seems to denounce the type of subjects that Victorian girls had at school. Besides, the servants' role as helpers in Bertha's imprisonment is also certainly radical, as one of them opposes to her master's ideas.

#### **2.2.4.3. Gender Identity**

Following Brontë, Jane seems to defy many restrictive social conventions, especially those which affect women. For instance, she strives for freedom as well as moral and economic independence since she detests women depending on others for support, as it was already explained in section 2.2.4.1. She also rejects typical feminine speech since she often confronts the main dominant male characters (such as John Reed, Mr Brocklehurst, Mr Rochester, and St John Rivers) in a direct language, instead of answering them passively. In doing so, she faces both the patriarchy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the class system on which it is also based, and the Christian dogma that supports all. Thus, she uncovers the hypocrisy of the Victorian society, which only benefits white, wealthy, and (apparently) pious men of the time. However, following Helen Burns influence, she also has an internal conflict regarding religion, so she struggles to reconcile her friend's compassionate ideas with the injustices that she finds in the Church. On the one hand, religious forgiveness helps her to cope with the sins of others who damage her, but, on the other hand, she rebels against the religious constrictions based on gender roles.

Besides, other critics such as Sharon Friedman also review Bertha Mason's character as a Jane's alter ego, as whereas Mr. Rochester considers the latter as a compassionate and pure woman, the former is the representation

of a raving lunatic, full of emotion and violence. It is also that Mark Fortier and Laura Mulvey call 'the male gaze', that is, the representation of women according to a masculine vision in which they are considered either as the 'virgin' (in this case, Jane) or as the 'whore' (Bertha). Furthermore, it can be observed that none of the characters show a gay sexual identity, as men feel attracted to women and vice versa. According to Tiina Rosenberg, the perspective of gay and queer identities is omitted and thus, marginalised in the novel, whereas heteronormative identities are promoted in the mainstream British literary world.

Regarding gender identity in the stage adaptation, both works portray Jane with a direct speech towards not only the patriarchal system, but also the Church and class conventions. However, when it comes to her difficulties to reconcile religion and her own ideas, Richards barely reflects it in his play. However, he includes the significant contrast between Jane and Bertha since Mr Rochester claims that the former is so perfect, whereas the latter is a monster. Consequently, the adapter seems to focus on a marked feminist approach in this field since he prefers to omit as many topics related to religion as possible. Thus, following Friedman's, Fortier's and Mulvey's ideas on Bertha Manson as the alter ego of Jane Eyre and the dichotomy that both characters represent, Richards seems to omit the task of feminism when it comes to overturn this traditional perspective. He keeps representing both characters in the same way with dialogues that perpetuate this vision, especially from Mr. Rochester. Moreover, regarding Tiina Rosenberg's studies, Jay Richards does not deconstruct the sexual identities that appear in the novel, as he does not include any gay characters, contributing to hide the representation of minority identities.

#### **2.2.4.4. Motherhood**

A high number of critics resist to read and deconstruct Brontë's Jane as a mother, yet few of them consider that, despite she does not express an explicit desire to become a mother, she does it subtly and unconsciously following her job as a governess. Besides, she also has a special connection and relationship with Adèle and looks after Mr Rochester when he is vulnerable after having lost his sight and his hand in the fire that Bertha Manson sets. Therefore, she seems to embody a pseudo-mother for both. Besides, Jane also has a natural tendency to servitude, as after her experience at Lowood she aims to serve to Mr Rochester

and St John Rivers. Jane's infantilized treatment by them represents an Oedipal reading as a father and a daughter relationship. This approach of Jane's mentality juxtaposes with her feminist ideology.

Richard's stage adaptation offers a Jane's portrayal in which she has a more marked and modern maternity role than in the novel. Besides being Adèle's governess, she also becomes a kind of mother and protector for her. For instance, both enjoy gardening next to a servant, while Jane tells her that she must learn to appreciate her inner beauty. That is, Jane performs the typical Victorian role of maternity, but includes a feminist approach that is not so relevant in the novel. Nonetheless, her role as a pseudo-mother for both Mr Rochester and St John Rivers in the play reveals that she still has internalised Victorian the patriarchal system. Therefore, this stage adaptation aims to reinvent the traditional maternity role adding subversive and feminist sentences in Jane's dialogues, although he fails to approach her other role of mother with men similarly.

Concluding the section of 'Key issues' in *Jane Eyre*, marriage will be addressed first. Brontë addresses marriage as a social institution where women and men struggle for power, whereas Richards' position towards marriage maintains and even increases Brontë's feminist approach regarding Jane. Nonetheless, he omits Bertha Manson's injustices. With respect to the private/domestic sphere, Jane seems to be confined to the domestic realm in most of the novel despite her desire to become an independent woman, whilst Richards aims to represent a Jane whose job as a teacher is not so relevant, which could be considered a feminist approach. Besides, the servants' role as helpers in Bertha's imprisonment is also certainly radical, as one of them opposes to her master's ideas. As to gender identity, Brontë's Jane seems to defy many restrictive social conventions, especially those which affect women. Furthermore, other critics, such as Sharon Friedman, also review Bertha Mason's character as a Jane's alter ego, as whereas Mr. Rochester considers the latter as a compassionate and pure woman, the former is the representation of a raving lunatic, full of emotion and violence. Richards' play also portrays Jane with a direct speech towards not only the patriarchal system, but also the Church and class conventions. Regarding maternity, a high number of critics resist to read and deconstruct Brontë's Jane as a mother; yet few of them consider that, despite

she does not express an explicit desire to become a mother, she does it subtly and unconsciously following her job as a governess. Richards' stage adaptation offers a Jane's portrayal in which she has a more marked and modern maternity role than in the novel as the governess/mother of Adèle.

### 3. Conclusions

The aim of this TFG has been to answer certain questions concerning the feminist approach of the selected stage adaptations, so the essay has thoroughly explored them. As the introduction suggests, these questions aim to answer first the way some feminist classics of English literature are adapted to the stage. The second question tries to explore whether these theatre adaptations subvert the patriarchal system including a feminist approach, or whether they accept it. The first approach of this question would be the used in the novels, whilst the second approach would be a strategy utilised by the theatre adapters to adapt their plays to the predominant sexist ideology to have more audience and thus, better economic profits. I will summarise the main ideas on each of the selected stage adaptations next. First, certain conclusive ideas on Marian de Forest's *Little Women – A Comedy in Four Acts* will be drawn, and later, other conclusions concerning Richards' *Jane Eyre – A New Musical* will be remarked.

Marian de Forest based on Alcott's novel *Little Women* to create her adaptation, although the perspective of her play was less radical regarding feminism. With the aim of having commercial success, she conceived an adaptation of *Little Women* which focused on what the audience missed, that is, a reminiscent perspective of the rural America prior to the Civil War, when society was 'quieter' before the feminist movement started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Under the light of the analysis of the historical context of Alcott's novel, she wrote it at a time when people questioned certain moral and philosophical matters, such as the slavery or the position of women in society. As a result of the former, the American Civil War took place in that decade. That is why she did not focus on having extra income but on shaping society. Unlike Alcott's historical context, De Forest's adaptation was created in 1912, when industrialisation and capitalism were some of the rising trends at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the literary movements of her time, Realism and Melodrama, led to the

creation of plays that did not address excessive moral plots and that had plain characters. Consequently, it can be inferred that her play had a less traditional approach because she had a commercial purpose, that is, she tried to please her audience to make money, instead of changing their minds regarding certain social issues.

As to the stage adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, Richards represents a powerful message including the most important parts of Brontë's novel without forgetting the feminist approach – and he even includes new feminist ideas. Nonetheless, he omits some feminist symbols and some details of the oppression of Bertha Manson, that is, of black women. With respect to classism, Richards provides a wider perspective on marriages of convenience since his stage adaptation also addresses this type of marriages between servants. As to the tone, Richards' work has got some humorous dialogues (since his aim was to create a piece of entertainment probably), whilst Brontë includes a more serious tone in her novel.

A close comparison between Brontë and Richards shows that the former wrote her novel during the Victorian Age, the time of the Industrial Revolution and the British colonial empire. Black people suffered the injustices of slavery in America and postcolonialism in the colonies of the British Empire, so Brontë wanted to reflect on her novel how black people, and especially black women, faced these circumstances. However, Richards' theatre adaptation was conceived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, during the fourth feminist wave (focused on social media and the injustices of women in specific areas of the everyday life, such as the harassment of women in media) and in a mainstream white context (the USA). Moreover, he created his adaptation as a musical during a period when this type of plays was democratized for many kinds of audiences. As a result, he also had a subtle commercial aim. These are the reasons behind his apparently lack of awareness concerning the issues of colonialism and black women, unlike his focus on scenes that highlight feminist ideas for white women.

As a conclusion, it is necessary to provide a closer exploration of the answers that were previously posed regarding both stage adaptations. As already mentioned, De Forest's work addresses a reminiscent society of the quieter lifestyle during the Civil War, when feminism had not rocked the foundations of the entire world yet. But while it is true that Richards apparently includes a more feminist approach in his stage adaptation than De Forest due to the higher

number of feminist allusions to Brontë's work, when his work is deeply studied certain elements of the plot of the novel are missed (especially the feminist approach for black women). Consequently, both De Forest and Richards base their adaptations on a lighter feminist approach than their original authors, Alcott and Brontë respectively, and do not contribute to subvert completely the ruling patriarchal system. Furthermore, both adapters' reasons for this approach are essentially of a commercial type. That is, they created their works (or products) at a time when marketing and capitalism were the prevailing trends worldwide, as the true compass for companies of any kind when creating new and successful products and services was the study of the demands and needs of the middle-class, the main consumers.

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