

Latest *Eyre* adaptation's success lies in its subtleties

filmreview

Jane Eyre

Directed by Cary Fukunaga
Written by Charlotte Brontë, adapted by Moira Buffini
Starring Mia Wasikowska, Michael Fassbender, and Judi Dench
Opens April 1

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Arts & Entertainment Writer

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has been the literary equivalent of a tub of Ben and Jerry's for generations of women: good for combatting heartbreak and mood swings. However, popularity is a cross to bear, and *Eyre* has had to endure numerous adaptations in a wide range of mediums, some less flattering than others. Up-and-coming director Cary Fukunaga takes on the challenge of creating a standout among all the other interpretations of Brontë's famous heroine, and comes away with notable success.

An early prototype of chick lit, *Jane Eyre* chronicles the remarkable events in the life of the otherwise ordinary character of Jane Eyre (Mia Wasikowska). Beset by the after-effects of a wretched childhood, Jane presents herself as a physically unexciting woman with an admirable intellect and an aggressively austere disposition.

When she becomes governess to the ward of Mr. Edward Rochester (Michael Fassbender), she learns that in spite of all her shortcomings, she's still found to be attractive. In a manoeuvre that was considered unusually progressive



at the time, Brontë's story also delays the consummation of Eyre and Mr. Rochester's romance until both parties have achieved some sort of gender equality.

Coupled with gothic motifs, energetic dialogue, and a dramatic skeleton in the closet, you can hardly blame the industry for wanting to resurrect the novel every few years.

Mia Wasikowska as Eyre is self-contained, yet more expressive than the Janes in some of the novel's previous film adaptations. Fukunaga employs Wasikowska's dance background in his direction, focusing on her body movement as a means to express her silenced emotions. Previous portrayals of Jane have always been timid and weak-looking, whereas Wasikowska embodies Jane with a confidence that

is more befitting for such a progressive character.

As per usual, Hollywood finds issue with casting unattractive male leads in a romantic film, even when the role calls for it. But looks aside, Fassbender does a wonderful job of embodying Rochester's idealistic yet flawed personality. Although his sideburns are slightly distracting, they aren't enough to detract from Fassbender's

performance.

Rochester is a difficult role to tackle, not just because of the idolatry that surrounds his character, but also because of his volatility. In the novel, Rochester is haughty and condescending, and Fassbender fluidly embodies all aspects of the role.

While Wasikowska and Fassbender have the benefit of a natural chemistry, the build-up of passions between the two lovers seems rushed at times, as if the destination was more important than the journey. One of the problems with adapting *Jane Eyre* is that much of the action takes place within Jane's thoughts, which tends to get lost when you translate the script into a more active medium.

Fukunaga's Victorian universe is a welcome deviation, using minimalist lines and bright, overexposed shots to create a clean Puritan look. Both the houses and gardens are sparsely furnished, and open areas lend a feeling of spaciousness. Unlike the gloomy and cluttered designs of previous *Eyre* adaptations, Fukunaga achieves a gothic look with starkness.

It's also interesting to note that while Fukunaga has stated his intention to draw out the gothic horror elements in *Jane Eyre*, this is only obvious in the cinematic trailer. The final product belies a more romantic influence, but this certainly doesn't diminish the overall potency of the film.

Fukunaga proves his mettle by challenging the long tradition of *Jane Eyre* adaptations and producing a cinematic offering that does justice to the passionate romance between Jane and her master. As Jane would say: viewer, I liked it.

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