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(There are a couple of Korean words I was not sure about spelling on page 6, and I couldn’t find the spelling for patreon supporters on page 7.)

**Vanessa** [00:00:01] In 2015, another novel adaptation of Jane Eyre was released into the world: Re Jane by Patricia Park. Park's version of the character Jane Eyre is named Jane Re. Jane Re is half Korean-American, half white American, a New Yorker in her early 20s. She's been living with her aunt and uncle, trying to break into the finance world, but is struggling with early adulthood. Patricia Park did research for her adaptation of Jane Eyre in Korea on a Fulbright scholarship. The New York Times said that quote Jane Re may start her journey with ties to Jane Eyre, but she makes her own way in the world, and the result is a truly fresh, modern take on the coming of age novel. Park skips Jane Res childhood. This Jane takes a live in nanny and job in Brooklyn. The madwoman in the attic, a woman named Beth, who's a mild Karen and in the middle of her tenure process. Park's version of Rochester is Beth's cheating husband, a man named Ed, the father of Jane's ward. Ed turns out to be open to a true connection with his child's nanny, Jane. But he's also a little bit weak and kind of whiny. When Jane's affair with Ed inevitably hits the fan, Jane goes to seek out her mother's family in Seoul. She goes in search of cousins and a sense of home and identity in her imagined version of Korea. She leaves New York City on September 10th of 2001. She finds and connects with her cousins in Seoul. She also finds another love interest. But really, she finds herself, realizing that she is not half Korean and half white, or half American and half Korean or any other number of combinations, but is entirely herself and contains all of those combinations and more. We are interested in particular with this novel, not only because it's fantastic, which it is, but we're also interested because it does something so important. Jane Eyre takes Jane's Britishness deeply for granted as the baseline for goodness. Her Britishness, her pale skin, is part of why Rochester loves her. Park's portrayal of a half Korean-American Jane helps us see that it was never Jane's Britishness or her whiteness that made her special, although it did help in Rochester's racist eyes. It was her strong sense of self that made her so remarkable, and that is what Jane Re finds in Korea. When Jane comes back to a post-9 11 New York City, she comes back not to Ed, but to a life she feels more confident in living. At the end of the novel a true HEA. Jane is single, a CFO of a company she runs with her best friend, and is reunited emotionally with the surrogate family that raised her. We were lucky enough to get Patricia Park, author of Re Jane on the phone, and just before you hear my conversation with Patricia, we want to tell you that we are doing a fundraiser for the Loveland Foundation. The Loveland Foundation provides free therapy for black women and girls, and I'm sure I don't need to tell you that we are in the middle of a mental health crisis in the United States and that it is particularly bearing out on black women and girls. We have a $10000 goal for our community to raise money for this incredible foundation. And you can find out more at hotandbotheredrompod.com. I'm Vanessa Zoltan and this is On Eyre from Hot and Bothered.

**Vanessa** [00:04:36] Hi, Patricia, thank you so much for joining us. It's really an honor.

**Patricia** [00:04:40] Hi, Vanessa, thanks for having me.

**Vanessa** [00:04:42] So my first question is just like, why did you want to adapt Jane Eyre? It is not an easy adaptation. I would say that the difficulty level is like 11 out of 10. And I know Re Jane isn't a total like note for note adaptation, but I'd love to hear why this book.

**Patricia** [00:04:58] I guess it's kind of audacious, right, that I took this revered classic and I'm like, You know what? I'm going to set in the world of blue collar Korean-American Queens. You know, Victorian is everywhere must be rolling in their graves. But it actually started with, you know, when I first read Jane Eyre, I was a pre-teen and I was really struck by how Jane self-identified as poor, obscure, plain and little. I mean, she was like the ultimate underdog, and she was such a departure from these beautiful Disney heroines that I was weaned on. She's even different from all the Jane Austen, like the pretty but like kind of poor, but they still don't work all day, like that whole cast of heroines. And I realized, too, that, you know, when I when I was growing up, my mother would, you know, when I would misbehave? She would say to me, in her particular limited English, you act like an orphan. And I never understood that. I'm like, How do you act like one? And for her generation of postwar Koreans or wartime Koreans, to act like an orphan meant you behaved in a way as if you had no parents. And I realized that a lot of the treatment that Jane Eyre faces within her the construct of her Victorian world she's called mischievous, friendless, childless, the sheer hostility that she's often faced with. I think it's tied a lot to that Victorian understanding or the construct of the orphan as something kind of mercurial, dangerous, and it seems similar to the Korean construct. So my mind kind of drew a link between these two very different cultures and communities and Re Jane was born.

**Vanessa** [00:06:28] Can you help me just unpack for a minute that accusation that your mom would make? Was it that you act as though nobody has taught you manners? Or was there like an original sin of orphanhood?

**Patricia** [00:06:43] (laughter) For one in Korean culture, in a culture like mine where I was born in America, but raised by Korean immigrants? There's a lot of talk of having a good family education and all of your education. All of your modes of conduct came from your family, and Korean culture is one where, you know, we have some distant relative in in the countryside of Korea who has a record book of generations of my family, generations and generations. So bloodlines are very important. Family values are, and I think tied to that too is the emergence of the mixed race orphan, right. With the U.S. military presence in Korea there were camp towns that were set up in these kinds of bars, juicy bars and this culture of the local women that quote unquote served the GIs and you had these mixed race children as a product. And those children in Korea, until fairly recently, children were not granted Korean citizenship unless it was through the father who was a Korean citizen. So you had then these mixed race orphans who had no home, no country legally, no father or father inland. And it just kind of produces this very ambiguous, nebulous identity within an otherwise kind of a homogenous one.

**Vanessa** [00:07:58] Yeah. I mean, one of the things that we explored and On Eyre are the laws that impact people in such interpersonal ways. Her decision to stay with Rochester or not is based on this legal understanding of what rights she would have if she got pregnant. The ways that these laws that are decided on for really pernicious reasons, in the ways that they insidiously get into the lives of the vulnerable I feel like it's something that Re Jane deals with and that Jane Eyre deals with. And that's part of what I love about these novels is that they think through this is what would happen, right? Like this is what would happen if a character like Jane Re was born and was an orphan and was half Korean and had this white father, etc. And this is the life that she could potentially live with all of those constraints.

**Patricia** [00:08:46] Yeah. And I think that's part of the enduring classic nature of the original Jane Eyre, right? That it can produce all these other avenues. And there's so much nebulousness to with, oh, well, what rules were there for women, for 19th century women? Do they have any choices beyond marriage and or inheritance and or immigration and or death? The four only choices, sometimes all four. So it's so much fun to think about how Jane Eyre would translate if she came of age today.

**Vanessa** [00:09:18] Yeah. Well, so what was your goal with Re Jane in terms of thinking through that exact imagination? I mean, you have you have Jane Re coming of age in a very specific moment, right? The novel starts in 2000, 2001 and hinges around nine eleven. So, yeah, what was your goal in setting it at that time and setting it in a more modern time?

**Patricia** [00:09:40] Yeah, I mean, to go back to that poor, obscure, plain and little assessment of Jane herself, I just I wanted to tell an underdog story and not just a story of someone who survives, but someone who thrives and kind of owns that underdogness. So in the character of my Jane, Jane Re, she is mixed race. The story she's always been told was that her mother fell in love with some GI and then her mother died. And then her grandfather, you know, sees her like, swaddled on his doorstep, essentially and is like, aw damn it, I now have another problem I have to deal with. So the reason why I set it between 2000 and 2003 is because that was an interesting time, not just for New York. We have 9-11 coming up. We have 2003 and the blackout that kind of ends the novel. But in Korea, there were changing ideas towards the mixed race or honhyeol figure. A very up and coming actress was she was gaining a lot of popularity, but there were rumors that she was mixed and she denied those rumors. She said, No, I'm fully Korean. And then in 2003, I believe I have them in my notes, she had a press conference where she outed herself, and we learned that her father was actually an American GI. And from that moment on her popularity, she was just really on that cusp of breaking out plummeted. But then, only a few years later, you did have mixed race actors like Daniel Henney coming out and just owning it. So I realized Jane could not have been set as I was writing it. I had to set it just a little bit behind to kind of show that there were still these antiquated notions of, OK, you're mixed, then you're wearing essentially your mother's shame on your face because you're not 100 percent quote unquote Korean.

**Vanessa** [00:11:21] Yeah. What were the parts when you thought to yourself, OK, I'm going to write about the mixed race, Korean-American experience and Jane Eyre. What were the parts of Jane Eyre that you were like oh, I don't know if I'm going to be able to adapt that even if I want to. What were you most anxious about as far as this retelling?

**Patricia** [00:11:43] With all due respect to my fellow Eyreheads out there, I had huge issues with reader I married him. That iconic line Rochester as the great, Byronic, romantic, or maybe anti-romantic, hero. But I read the book when I was 12, right? And I'm like, who's this old guy who keeps jerking Jane around like he dresses up as a gypsy, tries to, like, take her secrets, and then he's like flirting with Blanche Ingram in front of her and subjecting Jane right? He's like, you must stay in the parlor and watch me flirt, but just hang out by like the windows and be hidden by the curtains. And then finally, her beautiful midnight moment in the garden and he's like, all right, you, you know, in the form of you, I want you. And she thinks, all right, it's on. Yeah, love, I'm getting finally what I've always dreamed of. And then on their wedding day, he's like, (laughter) psyche, oh I forgot to tell you I'm already married and my wife's up in the attic. So to me, I'm sorry. I know that there are a lot of purists out there who feel that this is the great, you know, they’re team Rochester. And for me that if we're to translate Jane Eyre in the modern day, I think that we have to be accurate and true and authentic to the choices that modern women have. That someone like Jane Eyre, no matter how pioneering she was for her time, do not.

**Vanessa** [00:13:05] Not only does Rochester act like a fortune-telling gypsy, he takes her two sovereigns and keeps them. She like donates them to the gypsy. It's how we find out later it's half the money she has in the world. He's like, Yeah, I'll keep that. What the heck? He's the worst.

**Patricia** [00:13:23] (laughter) The worst.

**Vanessa** [00:13:25] I love him but he's the worst. I mean, Ed in your book, sucks.

**Patricia** [00:13:31] (laughter) Yeah, I tried. I tried to make him sympathetic.

**Vanessa** [00:13:37] He can cook. He has a lot of feelings. There's a lot of great things about him. I totally understand why Jane goes for him. But I feel like you captured that ambivalence around Rochester really beautifully in your book.

**Patricia** [00:13:52] I feel like we all have a story, maybe of a time when we were taken with someone older when we were in a vulnerable place. My Jane, Jane Re, she meets Rochester at a time when she is starved for love. She does not feel a sense of familial love, let alone romantic love. Her whole life, she's been told she is the other. She felt like the uncanny valley. She never felt in one identity or the other. And then you have this guy who takes a shine to her, and he is her almost like her Virgil into the world of academia, Brooklyn. And they share this outer boroughs sensibility. And so they find common ground. And how special is that Jane, who's so vulnerable trying to find her place in the world and you have this older man who also is kind of, you know, has cheekbones for days, right? And he takes a shine to you and he's translating and he's speaking your language. By the end, it's very funny because this novel took me forever to write and I aged while writing it, so maybe in the beginning I might have identified more with Jane, but towards the end of the novel, I was identifying more with Ed and these horrible like beer pong kind of house parties and, you know, the outer stretches of Queens and everyone's drinking from red solo cups. And all you want to do is go home and put on your comfy pajamas. So that's kind of Ed's trajectory and my thinking behind that character.

**Vanessa** [00:15:16] Yeah. I'm so sorry. I insulted your beloved, Ed. I was just saying that I think that you captured all of the reservations that we have about Rochester, of you're older, you're the employer, sometimes you're not even nice to her, but we still are rooting for you or certainly understand the appeal. I feel like you did that so well in your book.

**Patricia** [00:15:39] Oh, thanks so much, Vanessa. But no, yeah, I mean, he's also my Ed too is controlling. He's a little bit of a mansplainer. You know, he was so subordinated, I suppose, when he married Beth, the quote unquote madwoman in the attic. So now here's this young fresh woman who's all ears for you. Oh, wait, no, she's not all 100 percent all ears. So there are many facets to this. Yeah, but yeah, a reader, I did not marry him. (laughter)

**Vanessa** Yeah.

**Patricia** Might be a kind of a more fitting thesis, I suppose.

**Vanessa** [00:16:12] So that is always the thing that you started pointing us in this direction. The thing that always worries me on behalf of the author is I'm like, Oh no, how are you going to handle Bertha? And you, I mean, you've already hinted at this. You don't have Bertha slash Beth in your novel as this like big secret. You have the madwoman in the attic being the controlling mom boss to the nanny. And you go about it in a very different way. And I'm wondering if you could talk about your feelings about Bertha and Jane Eyre and then how you thought about adapting her for your book.

**Patricia** [00:16:48] It's funny because my Bertha has the most power I would say in this novel, not only in her positionality as a white female, but as a very well-educated white female who comes of money who was of the gentrifying wave of Brooklynites buying up the brownstones. So I just thought it would be really funny and delightful and a kind of satirical academic send up if I made Bertha Mason, a women's studies tenure track professor. Because what could drive you more mad than that, the road to tenure? And I thought that that would be a really delightful way, also, to introduce the texts, the academic texts and scholarship that kind of treats the understanding of Victorian women and how problematic it can be, and contextualizing the limited choices and agency that they had. So, you know, with this character, I not only empowered her in a way that Bertha Mason never was. And yet she's this larger force. And in a weird way, in the original Jane Eyre, even though Bertha Mason is kept secret, she is, she haunts the novel, In some ways, literally, I mean, Jane constantly feels like she is being surveilled or there's something strange afoot. And I think it's fun just to kind of think about those possibilities and how we use the world around us now to retell something that was set deep in the past.

**Vanessa** [00:18:13] Yeah. I love thinking about your book Re Jane being in conversation with Jane Eyre from a hundred and seventy years ago and saying, let's give Bertha all the power rather than her having only power that she can take in snatches and fits and starts. Yes, this Beth is going mad, but it's also just like this wonderful gift to the older Bertha like, we're now going to have you be the one with all the power. I just think that that's really beautiful.

**Patricia** [00:18:43] Muaha.

**Vanessa** (laughter)

**Patricia** Maybe I shouldn’t have cued the diabolical. I should have cued the empowering female voice.

**Vanessa** Yes, exactly.

**Patricia** But in so doing, I'm actually exposing some of Charlotte Bronte's blind spots.

**Vanessa** Absolutely

**Patricia** You know, she takes the other. She takes the ethnic and quotes other and shrouds that with a sense of nefariousness, almost. And I think it's interesting when you look at some of the scholarship in understanding the madwoman in the attic and understanding how much Charlotte Bronte is just kind of echoing the tropes that were understood in Victorian times of quote unquote colored people. So how awesome that yes, Jane Eyre is enduring, but also there are some things that don't translate as well or kind of date the text. Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:19:34] My last question is just I would love to hear you talk about your Jane of Jane Re and going to Korea, and that is a parallel for Jane Eyre finding family with St. John, Diana and Mary and how you were thinking about her idea of leaving as a way of finding home.

**Patricia** [00:19:56] I love that question. I thought of Re Jane and three parts. Much like how the original Jane Eyre was published in three volumes, and I thought the original novel just had such a breath of fresh air. When we meet up with da da da, the cousins, you know, first these randos who save her and then surprise, surprise, they're all related. So I had a lot of fun thinking about that and then thinking about cooking up a new romantic interest for Jane. So in my version, there are three legs of Jane's journey. The first is going from Queens to Brooklyn, where she takes the job as an au pair. Then it's going from New York to Korea, where she reconnects with her family there and gains an understanding of her past. And then part three is their return to Queens and kind of a re appropriation of one's home and identity. With the part in Korea that's where she meets up with her equivalent of St. John, Mary and Diana. She meets a guy named Chung-hoon, or Chandler is his self-appointed American name. His last name is Kong, which is like the Korean word for river. So that was my kind of wink, wink, nod, nod to St. John. And he does everything by the book. You can almost picture his Gatsby-like timetables of, you know, that kind of schedule in Gatsby, where he's like you know, seven a.m. morning calisthenics and now all of these things that he can do. So Chung-hoon is like that, and it kind of speaks to this other side of Jane's brain. Romance aside, what Jane learns in Korea, I mean, she has such culture shock, and she was told one version of Korea growing up in Queens, and that was a version of Korea that's kind of stuck in stuck in the amber, right? It was a moment frozen in time and from the story she heard from her aunt and uncle. For me, similarly, I was born in New York. My parents left Korea for Argentina, actually in the 60s, and then they came to America where they met. So our version of Korea, it was so antiquated. Like, I grew up using the word outhouse for bathroom, you know, (unsure of the spelling of the Korean word). That's just what you called it. You know, we talk about going to the yak bang. What I thought I was saying was a pharmacy, but it was actually like apothecary, you know? And after grad school, I got a Fulbright grant to research this novel. I got a creative arts Fulbright grant so that I could finish writing and researching this novel to address part two that all took place in Korea. And wow, like Jane, I had a lot of that culture shock, so she pedals some of these same antiquated words. She sounds like a six-year-old fuddy duddy, but one departure is that Jane actually had a much better time adjusting than I did. And it's all tied to beauty and expectations thereof. The features that she was so ashamed of her whole life were suddenly celebrated in Korea. Everyone's like, Wow, your skin’s so pale, wow your eyes are so big, you're so tall, blah blah blah. I oh, I mean this with no false modesty, but more than once I was kind of well suggested that I get plastic surgery, or why did I not get plastic surgery? Or why do I look more like the before ads for the plastic surgery on all the subways and I had I had a much harder time. So in that regard, Jane's experience was pure fiction. Maybe it was wish fulfillment for me that she was even able to find some guy who had the hots for her, etc., etc. But one thing that really opened my eyes, though, in my experience to Korea, is that before I left, I kept saying, Oh, I'm going back to Korea, I'm going back returning, and I would use that kind of language surrounding my trip to Korea. But when I was there, it was became very apparent how American I was, how much of a New Yorker I was. So since coming back to the States, that is the kind of language that I use, it has asserted and affirmed my identity as a New Yorker and as an American. So it was a very valuable experience for me in researching this novel and then in the writing of it that both I and Jane realized who we are in the end.

**Vanessa** [00:23:50] Patricia, thank you so much for writing this amazing book and for taking the time to talk with us today. We're so grateful.

**Patricia** [00:23:55] Vanessa, Ariana, thank you so much for having me. It's always a pleasure to be around fellow Eyreheads.

**Vanessa** [00:24:04] After talking to Margot Livesey, the author of The Flight of Gemma Hardy and Patricia Park, I find that there are two things that it seems modern day authors want to fix about Jane Eyre. The first issue that these authors obviously feel as though they have to address is Bertha. Margot Livesey told us that from the beginning, she knew that the word attic wouldn't be in her novel, let alone a woman locked up in one. In Re Jane, Park’s Bertha, Beth, in the novel is quote unquote mad and that she's patronizing, but she's also mad because she's a woman trying to get tenure in her field while working in her Brooklyn house's attic and trying to raise a daughter as well and live with a cheating husband. This might be a good time to tell you that Park is, by the way, not only an author but assistant professor of creative writing at American University, where she is in the middle of applying for tenure. So Park isn't being tongue in cheek when she writes about the tenure process being a quote unquote crazy making one. The other thing that both Livesey and Park are interested in is the Rivers family part of Jane Eyre. Neither Livesey nor Park seemed to like that Jane falls and almost dies on the doorstep of people who turn out to be her cousins. Both Gemma and Jane Re go in search of their cousins, leaving their countries of origin to do so. Gemma goes all the way to Iceland and Jane Re goes all the way to Korea. It is as if both Park and Livesey want to take out the improbability to make Jane's win hers entirely, not fate’s. And I love that. The continuation of these retellings have many gifts, but using Jane Eyre as a way to keep tracking our values as we hopefully evolve seems to be one of them. And having more diverse voices, de-Britishize, Jane and give this character credit for her own personal growth and successes seems the right path for me. You've been listening to On Eyre from Hot and Bothered. We’re in between seasons right now, but we are gearing up to do a deep dive into Pride and Prejudice in March, and that season will be called Live from Pemberley. If you'd like to support us in making the new season, please consider supporting us on Patreon at Patreon.com/hotandbotheredrompod. We want to give a special shout out to some special people who are supporting us in our Jane Bennett tier. Alise Kanagrantnam, Gretchen Snegis, Molly Real, Kristen Hall, Leah Baxley, two cats and a book, Becky Boo and Bitty. You are doing so much to make this work possible, and we're so grateful. We are a Not Sorry Production, my host during the regular season is Lauren Sandler, our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman and we are distributed by acast. Again, a very special thanks to the wonderful Patricia Park for speaking to us for this episode. And thanks as always to Lara Glass, Julia Argy, Gaby Ori, Nicki Zoltan, Stephanie Paulsell, and we'll be back with a conversation about the life of Charlotte Bronte in two weeks.