

On Saturday 9th January 2016, I attended a theatre trip with the English department to the Theatre at the Mill in Newtownabbey to see a special screening of Charlotte Bronte's classic: Jane Eyre, that was performed and filmed in a theatre in London.

I was pleasantly surprised by the experience, and I now hold a memory of a particularly enjoyable night, I really loved it.

It was unlike any production I have seen before, and for those who know me, you will know that I have seen a fair few in my time! The whole play was performed by six actors, who covered about three or four different characters each, with great fluency and admirable skill. They used one set throughout the duration of the play (similar to Sweeney Todd) which included many different levels and several ladders which was cause for some great entertainment, and probably much to the actors dislike, a thorough workout! My favourite character, believe it or not, was Mr. Rochester's dog, Pilot, who was played rather accurately and convincingly by a male actor... he made me giggle at every appearance. My favourite part of the whole play was actually the music. They had a professional singer who provided the music throughout the whole show, one extended song which spanned the entirety of the show, the same melody, mostly the same lyrics, but there were some alternates and I was astounded by her perfect, angelically haunting voice, I could listen to it forevermore. There was also one beautiful male singer who sang too. It was all very minimalist with the instruments, and the costumes, but I feel it suited the simple, plain, nay even traditional way of life in terms of the time period that it was set in, the nineteenth century.

The show lasted for three hours but it did not seem it, as the story line of this play is so sumptuous and eventful, that not once, were you left bored or distracted thinking about the time. For those of you who aren't familiar with the story;

Jane Eyre is a young orphan being raised by Mrs. Reed, her cruel, wealthy aunt. A servant named Bessie provides Jane with some of the few kindnesses she receives, telling her stories and singing songs to her. One day, as punishment for fighting with her bullying cousin John Reed, Jane's aunt imprisons Jane in the red-room, the room in which Jane's Uncle Reed died. While locked in, Jane, believing that she sees her uncle's ghost, screams and faints. She wakes to find herself in the care of Bessie and the kindly apothecary Mr. Lloyd, who suggests to Mrs. Reed that Jane be sent away to school. To Jane's delight, Mrs. Reed concurs.

Once at the Lowood School, Jane finds that her life is far from idyllic. At Lowood, Jane befriends a young girl named Helen Burns, whose strong, martyrlike attitude toward the school's miseries is both helpful and displeasing to Jane. A massive typhus epidemic sweeps Lowood, and Helen dies of consumption. She spends eight more years at Lowood, six as a student and two as a teacher.

After teaching for two years, Jane yearns for new experiences. She accepts a governess position at a manor called Thornfield, where she teaches a lively French girl named Adèle. The distinguished housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax presides over the estate. Jane's employer at Thornfield is a dark, impassioned man named Rochester, with whom Jane finds herself falling secretly in love. She saves Rochester from a fire one night, which he claims was started by a drunken servant named Grace Poole. But because Grace Poole continues to work at Thornfield, Jane concludes that she has not been told the entire story. Jane sinks into despondency when Rochester brings home a beautiful but vicious woman named

Blanche Ingram. Jane expects Rochester to propose to Blanche. But Rochester instead proposes to Jane, who accepts almost disbelievingly.

The wedding day arrives, and as Jane and Mr. Rochester prepare to exchange their vows, the voice of Mr. Mason cries out that Rochester already has a wife. Mason introduces himself as the brother of that wife—a woman named Bertha. Mr. Mason testifies that Bertha, whom Rochester married when he was a young man in Jamaica, is still alive. Rochester does not deny Mason's claims, but he explains that Bertha has gone mad. Rochester keeps Bertha hidden on the third story of Thornfield and pays Grace Poole to keep his wife under control. Bertha was the real cause of the mysterious fire earlier in the story. Knowing that it is impossible for her to be with Rochester, Jane flees Thornfield. Penniless and hungry, Jane is forced to sleep outdoors and beg for food. At last, three siblings who live in a manor alternatively called Marsh End and Moor House take her in. Their names are Mary, Diana, and St. John (pronounced "Sinjin") Rivers, and Jane quickly becomes friends with them. St. John is a clergyman, and he finds Jane a job teaching at a charity school in Morton.

St. John decides to travel to India as a missionary, and he urges Jane to accompany him—as his wife. Jane agrees to go to India but refuses to marry her cousin because she does not love him. St. John pressures her to reconsider, and she nearly gives in. However, she realizes that she cannot abandon forever the man she truly loves when one night she hears Rochester's voice calling her name over the moors. Jane immediately hurries back to Thornfield and finds that it has been burned to the ground by Bertha Mason, who lost her life in the fire. Rochester saved the servants but lost his eyesight and one of his hands. Jane travels on to Rochester's new residence, Ferndean, where he lives with two servants named John and Mary.

At Ferndean, Rochester and Jane rebuild their relationship and soon marry. She says that after two years of blindness, Rochester regained sight in one eye and was able to behold their first daughter at his birth.

As always, however, it's not where you are, it's who you're with as I like to say, and it was lovely to see my friends at the weekend and catch up with Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Massy, and we shared some great banter of course. All in all, it was a great night, and I would highly recommend attending any future theatre trips with the English department if you get the chance.

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