

JANE EYRE ON STAGE,
1848-1898

PATSY STONEMAN

JANE EYRE ON STAGE, 1848–1898

*For Colin,
who has always believed in me*

Jane Eyre on Stage, 1848–1898

An Illustrated Edition of Eight Plays with
Contextual Notes

PATSY STONEMAN
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The Nineteenth Century Series

General Editors' Preface

The aim of the series is to reflect, develop and extend the great burgeoning of interest in the nineteenth century that has been an inevitable feature of recent years, as that former epoch has come more sharply into focus as a locus for our understanding not only of the past but of the contours of our modernity. It centres primarily upon major authors and subjects within Romantic and Victorian literature. It also includes studies of other British writers and issues, where these are matters of current debate: for example, biography and autobiography, journalism, periodical literature, travel writing, book production, gender, non-canonical writing. We are dedicated principally to publishing original monographs and symposia; our policy is to embrace a broad scope in chronology, approach and range of concern and both to recognize and cut innovatively across such parameters as those suggested by the designations 'Romantic' and 'Victorian'. We welcome new ideas and theories, while valuing traditional scholarship. It is hoped that the world which predates yet so forcibly predicts and engages our own will emerge in parts, in the wider sweep, and in the lively streams of disputation and change that are so manifest an aspect of its intellectual, artistic and social landscape.

Vincent Newey
Joanne Shattock
University of Leicester

Abbreviations and References

Abbreviations: used for archives and journals frequently cited in footnotes.

References: Short references in footnotes (normally authors' last names) can be expanded by consulting the 'List of Works Cited' at the end of this book.

Please note that where journal articles are referred to archive sources rather than the original journals, the bibliographic details may be incomplete or even missing if the archive clipping is not fully identified.

BPM	Brontë Parsonage Museum
CLSL: HC	Camden Local Studies Library: Heal Collection
<i>DNB</i>	Online <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>EA&A</i>	<i>The Era Almanack and Annual</i>
<i>ILN</i>	<i>The Illustrated London News</i>
<i>ISDN</i>	<i>The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News</i>
HTC	Harvard Theatre Collection
NYPLPA: BRTC	New York Public Library for the Performing Arts: Billy Rose Theatre Collection
<i>NYST</i>	<i>New York Spirit of the Times</i>
<i>NYT</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
SLSL	Southwark Local Studies Library

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Librarians in the Billy Rose Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the British Library Manuscript Room, the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Harvard College Library, the Houghton Collection of Harvard University and the London Theatre Museum, together with Local Studies Librarians in Bradford, Camden, Coventry, Leeds, Oldham and Southwark, and the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, have provided essential help.

Formal acknowledgement is due to the institutions who have given me permission to reproduce the images in my illustrations: to the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lenox and Tilden Foundations for the 1848 Courtney playbill, the anonymous 1867 playbill, the portraits of John Brougham and Laura Keene, the etched scene from Brougham's play and the 1873 photograph of Charlotte Thompson; to the British Library for manuscript pages from the plays by Hering, Paul, Willing and Wills; to the Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library for the Coburg Looking-Glass Curtain and the etched scene from Charlotte Thompson's 1873 performance; and to V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum for the poster for the National Standard Theatre. Detailed credits will be found in the List of Illustrations and with each figure in the text.

I am grateful to Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, for providing images of the Park Theatre, J.T. Douglass, and Stella Brereton, and to Hull University Photographic Services for providing images of the 'View in the New Cut', the Surrey Theatre, the etched scene from *Nobody's Child*, the Globe Theatre and Mrs Bernard-Beere. Although all the images from Camden and Hull were published more than a hundred years ago, it is just possible that artists' copyright might still apply. I have not been able to trace the owners, but if anyone claims copyright, they should apply to the publishers of this work.

Introduction

Such then is a sample of what amuses the Metropolitan populace!¹

Charlotte Brontë's bemused, if not horrified, response to a *Jane Eyre* which was on stage in London only three months after the publication of her novel is well known. Until recently, however, nothing was known about the play, its author or the circumstances of its performance, although the information was not hard to find.² The reason seems to be that before the advent of cultural studies, this kind of theatrical event fell between the traditional fields of literary and dramatic scholarship. Literary critics, focused on the unique qualities of Charlotte Brontë's novel, saw adaptations only as travesties of her text, while for theatre critics, adaptations by definition lacked dramatic authenticity.

Two shifts in academic focus have altered the status of such ephemeral texts. From the perspective of sociology and politics, the discipline of cultural studies has revealed the ideological importance of popular culture. From the perspective of linguistic theory, poststructuralism has challenged the traditional separation of high from low culture by arguing for the cultural interconnectedness of all textual production. Despite its potentially leveling implications, a theory of intertextuality is not necessarily at odds with traditional aesthetic values. The classic status of a text such as *Jane Eyre* is sometimes measured by its 'excess of meaning': a richness and complexity which finds responses in different communities and generates widely differing readings. Ephemeral derivatives, such as the plays in this volume, collectively testify to the fruitful excess of their classic pre-text while individually they act as unique markers of social and ideological change.

When, more than twenty years ago, I began collecting material for my book, *Brontë Transformations: The cultural dissemination of 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights'*, I was fascinated by the processes which transform famous texts into common cultural property. Even so, I did not think of looking for the play that Charlotte Brontë mentions. It was a talented postgraduate student who told me that not just one, but several stage versions of *Jane Eyre* could be found in the Lord Chamberlain's collection of manuscript plays in the British Library.³ Prompted by the variety and liveliness of what I encountered, I conceived the twofold ambition which lies behind this book: to transcribe and edit the play-texts in order to preserve them and make them available;

¹ Charlotte Brontë in Smith, Vol. 2, p. 27; quoted in full in the section on the reception of John Courtney's play, below. *Jane Eyre* was first published in October, 1847.

² As far as I know, Donna Marie Nudd (*Jane Eyre*) was the first person to identify the playwright as John Courtney and the theatre as the Victoria.

³ I shall always be grateful to Sarah Cheesmond for setting me off on this research.

and to propose some hypotheses which might explain, in social and ideological terms, the many changes, sometimes bizarre and outrageous, which the playwrights made to Charlotte Brontë's novel.

Ironically, we owe the preservation of these plays to British censorship. From 1843 to 1968 every play performed in public in Britain had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for approval; the Lord Chamberlain's Plays, therefore, form an almost complete record of theatrical performances for more than a century.⁴ I found six versions of *Jane Eyre* in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays, performed between 1848 and 1882; there are also two plays from the same period which were performed and published in New York. Although some of the plays were being performed until the end of the century, no new play seems to have been written until 1909.⁵ These plays, therefore, form a natural group. In chronological order, they are:

1848	'John Courtney' [John Fuller]	<i>Jane Eyre or the Secrets of Thornfield Manor</i>	Victoria Theatre, London
1849	John Brougham	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Bowery Theatre, New York
1867	Anon.	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	New Surrey Theatre, London
1870	Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer	<i>Jane Eyre or the Orphan of Lowood</i>	Fourteenth Street Theatre, New York
1877	Mme von Heringen Hering	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Theatre Royal, Coventry
1879	'James Willing' [J.T. Douglass]	<i>Jane Eyre or Poor Relations</i>	Park Theatre, Camden Town, London
1879	T.H. Paul	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Adelphi Theatre, Oldham
1882	W.G. Wills	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Globe Theatre, Strand, London

In this book, the edited text of each play is preceded by five head-notes:

- on the original text and the principles on which it has been edited;⁶
- on the playwright;
- on the original theatre(s) and performance(s);
- on the reception of the play (I have tried to reserve this section for comments on the play as an adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, separating these from comments on the actors or staging, which will be found under 'theatres and performances');

⁴ See Booth et al., Vol. 6, pp. 40–42, for information on the Licensing Laws.

⁵ Miron Leffingwell, *Jane Eyre*, 1909. Morton Collection ts 316, University of Chicago.

⁶ It is unlikely that any of these manuscripts has authorial status, although I have not been able to check them against an authorial holograph. Some are in several hands. Stephens suggests that the Lord Chamberlain's copy was often made by a poorly-paid 'drudge', though 'in some cases the author's MS was used for this purpose' (*Profession*, p. 187).

- a brief list of distinctive features for each play (Table 1 shows how the action of each play is distributed in comparison with the locations in the novel).

The head-notes to the plays provide all the detailed information I have been able to find about the individual plays. This introduction, however, allows me to consider the plays as a group – firstly to place them in their theatrical context, and secondly to consider how their various revisions of the novel relate to the social and ideological context in which they were performed.

The Theatrical Context

None of the eight plays was performed at a prestigious West-End theatre. They were written to meet the insatiable popular demand for domestic melodrama which particularly characterized the ‘transpontine’ theatres – so called because they were ‘across the bridge’ on the unfashionable south or Surrey side of the Thames. The first two British plays in this collection (1848 and 1867) were performed at the principal transpontine theatres – the Victoria and the Surrey – appealing to huge and rowdy audiences.⁷ The last play in the group, however (1882), was performed at the smaller, more genteel Globe Theatre, off the Strand;⁸ it is a more thoughtful, less sensational play, and clearly appeals to a more middle-class audience. This group of plays thus spans, and demonstrates, that period of significant change in theatrical history called the ‘gentrification’ of the theatre.

The early years of the nineteenth century saw an unprecedented increase in the population of London and an equivalent demand for amusement at prices that working people could afford. Large numbers of theatres were built during this time,⁹ many of them with a capacity of thousands in the low-priced pit and gallery seats, and, according to Mayhew, the more prosperous working people were able to go to the theatre several times a week. The evening’s entertainment would last for up to six hours, with many different items included. Theatres needed to be resourceful to meet this level of demand from a mostly local audience. At the beginning of this period, most theatres kept a ‘stock company’ with a repertory of plays, and expected to change their programmes fairly often. Thus there was a ‘constant demand from managers for new pieces at very short notice, perhaps as little as twenty-four hours’,¹⁰ and since playwrights were paid at pitifully low rates, the adaptation of popular novels was an obvious and labour-saving choice.¹¹ The demand also led to widespread piracy,

⁷ See head-notes for details.

⁸ Not to be confused either with Shakespeare’s Globe or with the Globe Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue.

⁹ Most South Bank and East End theatres had been built by 1843 (Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 33); few theatres were built between 1843 and 1860 (Rowell, p. 13).

¹⁰ Stephens, *Profession*, p. xii.

¹¹ Novelists were paid between ten and a hundred times more than playwrights of the period (Booth et al., Vol. 6, pp. 51–4).

Table 1 Locations used in the plays

Blank areas indicate locations not used

Charlotte Brontë	'John Courtney' [John Fuller]	John Brougham	Anon	Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer (US)	Mme Hering von Hering	'James Willing' [J.T. Douglass] and Leonard Rae	[T.H. Paul]	[W.G. Willis]
1847	1848	1849	1867	1870	1877	1879	1879	1882
Gateshead		Act I	Prologue Sc 1–7	Act I Sc 1–6	Prologue			
Lowood	Act I Sc. 1–2	Act I Sc 1					Act I Sc 1–2	
Thornfield	Act I Sc 3–5 Act II Sc 1–6 Act III Sc 1–2	Act I Sc 2 Act II Sc 1 Act III Sc 1–3 Act IV Sc 1–3	Act II	Act I Sc 1–6 Act II Sc 1–12 Act III Sc 1–7	Act II Sc 1–6 Act III Sc 2–12 Act IV Sc 1–9	Act I Sc 1–3 Act II Sc 1	Act II Sc 1 Act III Sc 1–3	Act I Act II Act III
Morton	Act III Sc 3–4	Act V Sc 1				Act III Sc 1–4		
Ferndean	Act III Sc 5–6	Act V Sc 2–3				Act IV Sc 1		Act IV

especially of foreign plays, and the 1867 play in this collection must have been pirated, either from a performance, or from a prompt-book, since its German source was not printed until 1870.¹²

Although there are clear differences between the earliest and the latest plays in this group, they all fall into the most popular theatrical genre of the nineteenth century – melodrama. The word literally means ‘music drama’ and its history in Britain was also directly shaped by the theatre licensing laws.¹³ Before the Theatre Regulating Act of 1843, only two theatres in England – Covent Garden and Drury Lane – were licensed to produce serious drama carried by the spoken word.¹⁴ We still speak of the ‘legitimate’ drama with this meaning. All the other, so-called ‘minor’, theatres had at least to appear to be offering something different. Horse-riding, clowning, acrobatics, dumb-shows, water-tanks and firework displays were some possibilities. Sensational visual effects were as important as spoken words; a scene in Paul’s *Jane Eyre*, for instance, ends with the ‘Maniac’ on the parapet of Thornfield against a background of flames, while Jane points to her, naming Rochester’s duty: ‘save your wife!’ The conventions of dumb-show persist in scenes which end with a ‘picture’ or ‘tableau’ in which the characters strike a pose to reinforce its moral impact. In the 1867 play, for instance, Jane’s denunciation of Aunt Reed is frozen into a ‘picture’. It was, however, the provision of music that had the magical effect of transforming, for legal purposes, what was essentially a spoken play into something else, often defined vaguely as a ‘burletta’.¹⁵ By 1843 the minor theatres had become skilled in evading the law by such means, and melodrama took its distinctive form from the need to combine a spoken text with musical accompaniment.

Theatres often had ‘sizeable’ orchestras which provided an ‘almost continuous’ accompaniment to plays, and ‘often played *with*, or at least *under* an actor’s voice’.¹⁶ The 1848 and 1867 manuscripts of *Jane Eyre* do not mention music (although it is credited on the 1867 playbill), but the fact that music is not mentioned does not mean that it was not used; on the contrary, ‘music was such an integral part of performance that by the 1850s few critics mentioned it, and few scripts indicate its inclusion’.¹⁷ In the other *Jane Eyre* plays, music is specified variously for social events (Brougham) or to heighten emotion (Hering), and theatre orchestras would have a stock of “‘hurry music”, “combat music” and “love music” applicable to many plays’.¹⁸ The playbills for the later American plays specify a medley of light classics, but the W.G. Wills play

¹² Stephens, *Profession*, gives details of how the dialogue of plays in performance was copied by teams of pirates (p. 86).

¹³ Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 44.

¹⁴ Booth, M., *Theatre*, p. 151.

¹⁵ Rowell and Jackson, p. 9.

¹⁶ Booth, M., *Theatre*, p. 123. Mayer (pp. 51–2) gives details of leit-motifs etc and (pp. 56–61) includes facsimile scores with spoken cues.

¹⁷ Taylor, p. 124.

¹⁸ Robertson Davies, in Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 266.

in this collection is superior in having music specially composed by a well-regarded composer.¹⁹

Speaking over music ‘inevitably led to a heightened, deliberate and passionate mode of delivery’, with many pauses to allow the words to carry; actors emphasised their words by facial and bodily gestures ‘on an almost balletic scale’.²⁰ Acting manuals instructed actors in the precise coding of emotion by gestures indicating horror, despair or rapture,²¹ conventions which survive not only into silent films but in present-day staging of nineteenth-century opera and ballet.²² Other hybrid theatrical forms also merged with melodrama, so that such plays often offered slap-stick comedy, grotesque costumes and tumbling, elaborate scene-painting and sensational effects requiring real animals, fireworks, water-scenes or stage machinery.²³ In a ‘stock’ company, members specialized in ‘stock’ characters (who were sometimes ‘colour coded’ – ‘black villain, scarlet woman, spotless maiden and motley fool’²⁴) and stock situations, including marital squabbles in which the woman comes off best.²⁵ In Brougham’s play, the servant John marries Grace Poole in order to introduce scenes of this kind.

The licensing laws thus lay behind many features of melodrama. A drama with musical accompaniment, dumb show and visual sensation needed strong and simple moral contrasts, in which good and evil are clearly differentiated and motivations are unambiguous. This drama was so well attuned to the tastes of the time, however, that when the Theatre Regulating Act of 1843 finally abolished the monopoly of the patent theatres, there was no immediate change in the kind of drama provided in all the others.²⁶ On the contrary, the legitimate theatres had themselves already yielded to the demand for melodrama, which remained the predominant theatrical form for most of the century.

The gradual process of gentrification, however, meant that some smaller theatres were built (such as the Park and Globe Theatres where Willing’s and Wills’s plays first appeared), and in existing theatres the pit benches were gradually replaced by stalls, and thus changed from the cheerful province of cut-price hecklers to a more genteel area.²⁷ Figure 7 shows the New Surrey Theatre in 1866, with its pit filled with backless benches, although it did have ‘two rows of stalls’.²⁸ Michael Booth writes that ‘by 1880 the middle-class conquest of the theatre auditorium, and consequently

¹⁹ See headnotes to the plays for details. Taylor (p. 125) quotes Charles Reade’s account of the importance of an accomplished dramatic musical director.

²⁰ Taylor, pp. 125, 129; see also Booth, M., ‘Acting’, pp. 31–6.

²¹ James, p. 7; Taylor, pp. 38–9.

²² See Robertson Davies, in Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 269.

²³ See head-notes to the 1867 play for stage effects and to Willing for scene-painting.

²⁴ Taylor, p. 122.

²⁵ Booth, M., ‘Acting’, p. 37.

²⁶ Taylor, p. 16.

²⁷ Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 18.

²⁸ *ILLN*, 20 January 1866, p. 2163.

of the drama itself, was complete'.²⁹ The Park and National Standard Theatres, however, where Willing's play was performed in 1879 and 1881, aimed at a mixed audience, and compromised, with stalls at the front and benches at the back (Figures 16 and 18).³⁰

By the 1860s, play runs in London were being lengthened by an influx of audiences who travelled from the country by train.³¹ At the same time, provincial repertory companies yielded to touring groups who could perform the same play many times over by moving from town to town.³² The 1877 play in this collection was performed by a company on a 'six nights' engagement' in Coventry (though it is not clear whether the tour continued) and both the Willing and Wills plays were performed in the north of England after their London beginnings. The extensive American career of Birch-Pfeiffer's play also depended on touring companies. Birch-Pfeiffer's play itself passed easily into the sphere of silent film, which was the natural inheritor of melodramatic gestures and effects.

The Plays as Versions of 'Jane Eyre', in their Social and Political Context

The emergence of melodrama was not purely a functional response to theatrical legislation; it was also a way of dealing with social change. Peter Brooks argues that melodrama began in France as an ideological vehicle for revolutionary protest, and Michael Booth confirms that in the mid-nineteenth century it was still 'anti-aristocratic, anti-employer, anti-landlord, anti-landowner and anti-wealth, often violently so'.³³ The plays in this collection, however, show that heightened indignation can co-exist, as in Dickens, with a general acceptance of class structures. Henry Mayhew records that the Chartists who filled the Victoria Theatre had only the vaguest ideas about social organization;³⁴ they were content to accept landowners so long as they were benevolent, and were much more eager for the come-uppance of hypocritical parsons, cheating shop-keepers and sadistic policemen – the 'rich' classes they had most to do with. The social order in melodrama is not overthrown but purged of its wickedness; melodrama is most vividly democratic in showing the oppressed poor as the arbiters of good and evil.³⁵

The 1848 version of *Jane Eyre* is a good example. John Courtney's play gives prominence to the servants at Lowood School, newly invented characters named Joe

²⁹ Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 21.

³⁰ See headnotes for more detail. Figure 21 shows the Globe Theatre in 1869, with mixed stalls and benches, though it may have changed by the date of Wills's play (1882).

³¹ Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 19.

³² Jackson, p. 81.

³³ Brooks, p. 14; Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 33.

³⁴ Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 20; see head-note to Courtney's play for details.

³⁵ Brooks, pp. 17, 44. The main interest of Paul's play, which may never have been performed, is its use of stock melodramatic motifs – satire against hypocrisy and greed, and defence of virtue.

Joker, Betty Bunce and Sally Suds. They are tired of the low pay and bad conditions, and cause so much trouble that Mr Brocklehurst has to call in the forces of the law. The clever servants, however, make their escape, tricking the constable and the beadle into diving through a window into a water-butt. The play opens with these scenes at Lowood School, where Jane is already a teacher, and the comedy conveys much explicit criticism of charity school management.

The Victoria Theatre had made a speciality of plays dealing with servants,³⁶ but the introduction of servants into the *Jane Eyre* plot is not just a commercial accretion; it reorients our perspective on the novel. We see the initial scenes from the servants' point of view, and it is Betty Bunce who introduces the play by telling us (in a curious kind of Cockney Yorkshire) that most of the 'scholars' at Lowood 'are orphans with cruel uncles and aunts who send them out of the way to be thumped, bumped and consumptionized.' Betty's description of the school, with its thumping and bumping, evokes the more brutal oppression of Dotheboys Hall,³⁷ and by sympathizing with the orphans, she makes it clear that she and the other servants are aligned with Jane as victims of oppression. Jane herself publicly denounces Brocklehurst: 'Charity! Oh, 'tis a monstrous mockery of it, 'tis persecution upon the helpless and unprotected – and I tell you, sir, that you should blush to own such feelings as inhabit your cold and uncharitable heart'. She leaves Lowood at the same time as Joe and Betty, so that her departure appears less the solitary flight of a Romantic individualist than part of a concerted rebellion of class victims. The class enemy, moreover, is represented not by Rochester's upper-class friends, who do not appear in this play, but by Brocklehurst and Jehediah Piper, a comic predatory shopman who cheats in an election and tries to seduce Betty.

1848, the year of this play, is, of course, the year of *The Communist Manifesto*, the final Chartist petition, and the 'year of revolutions' in Europe, and it is tempting to see revolutionary meanings in the play's innovations,³⁸ but the play is not revolutionary in its outcome. Jane marries Rochester just as Cinderella gets her Prince, and the rebellious servants from Lowood sink happily into the less oppressive servitude of Thornfield Hall. Nevertheless the play as a whole supports Peter Brooks's argument that the assertive rhetoric of melodrama is 'in all cases radically democratic'. If, as Brooks argues, the essence of melodrama is 'the dramaturgy of virtue misprized and eventually recognized',³⁹ then in this play it is the virtue and resourcefulness of servants and victims – the class from which the audience is drawn – which is recognized by a benevolent superior (Rochester), while the devious and parasitic middle classes are exposed as the real class enemy.

³⁶ See the head-note to the play for details.

³⁷ In Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839).

³⁸ Barker (*passim*) warns against the dangers of drawing facile conclusions.

³⁹ Brooks, pp. 15, 27.

John Brougham's play was written for New York's Bowery Theatre, equivalent in class terms to the transatlantic London theatres, where comedy was an essential part of the entertainment. The direction of Brougham's comedy, however, was different from Courtney's. While Courtney ignores the aristocrats, reducing them to off-stage shadows, Brougham puts them in the limelight and relentlessly mocks their inanity. In this version, Jane confronts Rochester's guests before his arrival and, therefore, without his protection, highlighting her vulnerable position. She is, however, more than adequate to the occasion. When Lord Ingram makes a clumsy pass at her – 'do you know, Jane, that you're devilish pretty?' – he finds himself 'Snubbed, by Jove!' and the curtain falls on '*Tableaux of astonishment*'. Jane's indignation is expressed in a bitter soliloquy:

Shame, shame upon their cruelty; [...] Better, a thousand times better, my solitary cell once more, than be gibed and mocked at by the vulgar-wealthy; to have the badge of servitude engraved upon my very heart, and know that tyrant circumstance has placed me in a world all prison, where every human being is a watchful jailor, and where you must endure the unceasing lash of insolence, the certain punishment of that statuteless but unforgiven crime, poverty.

Moments like this, inviting what Peter Brooks calls 'the admiration of virtue', are at the heart of melodrama.⁴⁰ Jane is initially left to face the enemy alone, but is finally surrounded by admiration. While the aristocrats have to be forced unwillingly to recognize her qualities, the servants 'cluster round' in approval, and Jane and Rochester's final reconciliation is greeted by cheering peasants. Once again, a lower-class audience is entertained by seeing class enemies mocked, while the play as a whole re-establishes social harmony by focusing on virtuous individuals.

For Charlotte Brontë's first readers, *Jane Eyre* was above all an independent woman, and, indeed, it is her spirited self-reliance which makes her an ideal heroine of melodrama. Courtney and Brougham revel in the emphatic display of Jane's virtue, but the melodramatic ideal does not easily map onto modern ideas of feminism. Donna Marie Nudd, in her pioneering study of *Jane Eyre* adaptations, lists ways in which the nineteenth-century male playwrights 'edit out' Brontë's feminism;⁴¹ she contrasts them unfavourably with Birch-Pfeiffer, whose play emphasizes Jane's talents and the equality of the lovers.⁴² Nudd's argument, however, shows signs of special pleading. It is true that in Courtney's play, Jane promises faithful support to Rochester before she could possibly know him, and in Wills's play, he only pretends to be dependent on Jane after his fall from the horse, but these incidents do not negate the effect of Jane's independent spirit. In five of these eight plays, Jane saves Rochester from the bedroom fire, as in the novel, and none of them shows the reverse, although in Brougham and Wills Jane faints when confronted with the murderous madwoman. Six of the plays

⁴⁰ Brooks, p. 25.

⁴¹ Nudd, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 39–51.

⁴² Nudd, *Jane Eyre*, pp. 73–83.

reproduce Jane's 'equal as we are' speech very much as in the novel, and though Willing shows Rochester proposing to Jane, this is to highlight his seductive culpability.⁴³ The need for a happy ending does mean that the plays' assertive indignation is mollified and deflected into conventional gender-harmony.⁴⁴ Despite Nudd's argument, however, it is the Birch-Pfeiffer group which most blatantly shows Rochester as unblemished hero, with Jane in need of his protection.

These three plays (1867, 1870 and 1877) are all versions of one originally written in German by Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer, and have certain things in common. They emphasise gender-relations, but in a conservative atmosphere. Although Jane is still an outspoken victim, the emphasis is less on her ability to defend herself and more on the importance of her having a strong and virtuous defender. These plays, whose sub-title is *The Orphan of Lowood*, begin with a Prologue in which Jane is still a child at Gateshead, where the pathos of an orphan betrayed by her guardian quickly evolves into righteous indignation. Jane's Uncle Reed, we learn, had exacted a promise from his wife that she would take care of Jane after his death. Aunt Reed has, of course, not fulfilled this promise and Jane deeply resents the treatment she has received from this so-called 'benefactress'.

In Charlotte Brontë's novel, Jane pours out her bitterness as she leaves to go to Lowood, but her outburst is heard only by Aunt Reed, and her accusations are ineffectual. In the Birch-Pfeiffer plays, Jane speaks in the presence of Mr Brocklehurst – and, of course, the audience – and threatens her aunt with divine retribution. In the 1867 play she asks her aunt:

did you not whilst grasping the death hand of my uncle swear to use me as though I were your own child – never to forsake me? How have you kept that oath? At another tribunal you will meet my uncle again – he will say, 'Where is the orphan girl I confided to your care? What have you made of her – how fulfilled thy vow?' Answer – 'I have persecuted – beaten her, banished her from my roof – to the stranger bequeathed her as a pauper homeless and friendless' –

and, turning to Brocklehurst, she concludes, 'now Sir, I am yours!'. This is a spectacular instance of what Brooks calls 'the desire to express all', in which Jane appears as the typical melodrama heroine, 'femme étonnante' – astonishing woman – 'because her demonstration, her representation, of virtue strikes with almost physical force, astounding and convincing. The melodramatic moment of astonishment is a moment of ethical evidence and recognition'.⁴⁵ Later in the play we find that this moment of 'ethical evidence' has indeed made its mark on Aunt Reed.

⁴³ The proposal scene is missing from Paul's manuscript.

⁴⁴ Although Helena Michie argues that Willing's representation of sisterhood between Jane and Blanche challenges the normal heterosexual denouement.

⁴⁵ Brooks, pp. 4, 26.

One innovation of the Birch-Pfeiffer plays is that the Reed family, grown up, take the place of Charlotte Brontë's Ingrams, and Georgina (or Georgine) Reed appears as Lady Claremont (1867), Clarens (1870) or Clarence (1877), a scheming widow, in the place of Blanche Ingram. In the Thornfield scenes, where Mrs Reed is confronted with the adult Jane, she appears almost as a tragic figure (certainly a rewarding part for an actress), unable to reconcile herself to the dependent whom she has wronged, yet whose passionate denunciation has poisoned her peace of mind. In these plays, although the young Jane is indignant, the adult Jane is particularly virtuous and long-suffering, freely forgiving her aunt and almost obtusely denying herself recognition of Rochester's regard.

Birch-Pfeiffer's play has some feminist elements. She presents Jane as not just a virtuous victim but a gifted one, whose talents are overlooked because of her class obscurity. Rochester is first drawn to her because he admires her paintings, which are prominent in the plot. Her talent is, however, sufficiently recognized by this kind 'protector' and does not call for any revision of gender relations. Birch-Pfeiffer's play is also conservative in class terms, particularly in its deference to aristocratic status. Brougham's play suggests that Rochester is the 'farmer's friend', who outspokenly prefers his governess to 'such as ye' (that is, Lady Ingram). Birch-Pfeiffer's Rochester, by contrast, is elevated to 'Sir Rowland Rochester' (1867) or even 'Lord Rowland Rochester'.

1867, the year in which the first English version of Birch-Pfeiffer's play was performed, was the year in which Disraeli came to power on a platform of 'noblesse oblige'. It was also the year of the Second Parliamentary Reform Bill, which enfranchised most middle-class men, raising debate about the responsibilities of power. John Stuart Mill's women's suffrage amendment was defeated, the established view being that women did not need to vote because women's interests were always 'covered' by the protection of a male relative. This question of male responsibility for women and children is central to all the Birch-Pfeiffer versions of *Jane Eyre* – a responsibility which extends beyond the immediate family, so that Rochester is described as a 'father to the neighbourhood'.

A man with Rochester's past, however, might not seem fit to follow the saintly Uncle Reed as Jane's protector; and accordingly the Birch-Pfeiffer plays share another innovation to the plot. The madwoman in the attic is revealed to be – no! not Rochester's wife, but the wife of his dead brother, whom he has taken in out of the goodness of his heart. Adèle is her daughter conceived out of wedlock, whom Rochester has adopted. To the question 'how have you treated the orphan child?', Rochester could thus answer without a blush. He also has the arrogance of virtue, telling Jane, in the 1877 version, 'I will have you, and no other!' to which Jane replies 'Ah Rowland, my lord – my world – I am yours!' and she 'throws herself into his arms'. Rochester then announces the marriage to the assembled party, 'embracing Jane with one arm and stretching the other towards heaven' while 'Jane has clasped her hands, and seems to pray'. The overall effect is to excite the audience's sympathies with the couple's evident sexual energies whilst at the same time confining them within a conformist matrix.

The rather sickening virtue of both the protagonists in the Birch-Pfeiffer plays gives way in our final three plays to a much more critical representation of Rochester. Although there are considerable differences among the plays by Willing, Paul and Wills, they all present Jane as a sexual object, to be ogled and subjected to compliments, sincere and otherwise. In Willing and Paul, she is also a financial object, since her inheritance is known from early on, and the Reed family, especially John Reed, is active in trying to trick her out of it. The presentation of Jane as an heiress so early in the play might seem a curious change, since it counteracts the victim status and vulnerability which were the stock in trade of the earlier melodramas. This group of plays, however, appeared at the time of public debate about the second Married Women's Property Act, which was finally passed in 1882. Before this date the whole of a single woman's capital would pass into her husband's ownership on marriage. In these later plays, then, a woman's ownership of money makes her vulnerable in a different way from the poor orphans of the earlier plays.⁴⁶

The 1879 play by 'James Willing' follows the Birch-Pfeiffer pattern in some respects; it has a Gateshead Prologue, for instance, although in this play Jane is already meek and virtuous as child, and forgives her aunt for her bad treatment before leaving her house. Like the Birch-Pfeiffer plays, this one also jumps to Thornfield, where Rochester's guests include a grown-up John Reed. Here, however, the similarities end. The rest of the guests are Ingrams and Eshtons, as in the novel, and John Reed presents himself as Rochester's rival for Blanche Ingram. In the novel, John Reed appears only as a child and we hear of his later dissipation only indirectly. In this play, however, he reappears at Thornfield, and if Rochester is a 'reformed rake', John Reed reminds us what a rake might look like in action; he becomes the stereotypical villain of melodrama.

The most startling innovation in this play is that John Reed seduces Blanche by staging a false marriage which acts as a parallel to Rochester's own attempted deception. While Jane flees, explicitly to protect her 'honour', Blanche succumbs and is then abandoned by the unrepentant Reed. Mr Brocklehurst is also enlisted in this play to give a comic dimension to this theme. After Jane's flight from Thornfield, it is Brocklehurst who takes her in and, from a hypocritical mixture of financial and sexual motives, offers her marriage. Jane, however, settles for the post of village schoolmistress, and scarcely has she established herself when Blanche, now barefoot and starving, arrives on her doorstep begging for a crust. In the manner of melodramas, the parallels and contrasts between them are made explicit. Blanche complains, of John Reed, 'he promised marriage – I, too credulous dupe, believed him, trusted him – loved him – but he robbed me of the choicest jewel of a woman's life – and then flung aside the empty casket'. Jane explains that she too has been deceived, 'cruelly – but –' and Blanche bitterly ends her sentence for her 'not – fallen – you would say'.

⁴⁶ It may be an accident that the *Daily News* advertisement for Wills's *Jane Eyre* on 21 February 1883 appears next to an advertisement for Mrs Holdsworth's guide to *The Married Women's Property Act of 1882*.

Blanche has already spelled out for the audience the meaning of the word ‘fallen’:

a cast off mistress – a woman of the streets – the woman, who suffers all the degradation, losing position, friends, station, is an outcast whose momentary sin no repentance can palliate, no reparation condone – the man, the betrayer, whose base passion has ruined the heart he should have cherished, society receives with open arms – he is free to ruin other homes, and send more innocent souls to perdition.

Jane, who already knows she is an heiress, now demonstrates true magnanimity by offering to share her fortune with Blanche, whom she calls ‘sister’.⁴⁷ When Jane and Rochester finally get together, Blanche is still with them, a surprising indication of what women might choose to do with independently owned money.

Earlier in Willing’s play, when Blanche is trying to choose between Rochester and Reed, one of her arguments for choosing Reed is the old saying, ‘a reformed rake generally makes the most devoted of husbands’. Blanche does not know that the maxim would apply just as well to Rochester, but Brontë’s novel itself seems to endorse the maxim. It is interesting, therefore, that the play by W.G. Wills, performed in 1882, harshly condemns Rochester as ‘reformed rake’. This play is the only one in this collection to begin at Thornfield, with no Gateshead or Lowood scenes. Jane’s unhappy childhood and orphan status are conveyed only through her conversation with Rochester, whose laconic tone replaces the indignant rhetoric of the earlier plays. Moreover, she has come to Thornfield not direct from Lowood, but from a safe home with good friends, the Rev. Prior and his mother (invented for this play). Mr Prior continues to monitor Jane’s welfare (his only drawback being his unwelcome proposals of marriage), and he is there to take her away when she decides she must leave Thornfield. Although there is much emphasis on the Ingrams’ sneering at Jane, her education and calm demeanour protect her, while Rochester’s love appears to provide a final vindication. There is a sensational scene where the maniac suddenly appears intent on killing Jane, but there is no foreboding laughter or other building of suspense. Much of the normal machinery of melodrama is thus absent; the tone of the play is quiet, and Jane is not a notable victim either in class terms, or as an orphan, or as the fearful occupant of a ‘haunted’ house. She is not even vulnerable as an heiress, since there is no mention of her legacy in this play.

Jane’s vulnerability in this play lies, in fact, entirely in her sex, and its most surprising feature is the way in which this aligns her with other women across class divisions. While in Charlotte’s novel and in most of the plays Jane is presented as friendless apart from Rochester,⁴⁸ in this last play by W.G. Wills she has the support

⁴⁷ It is possible that this playwright was influenced by reading Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), in which Gaskell describes ‘a village girl that had been betrayed some little time before, but who had found a holy sister in Charlotte’ (Oxford World’s Classics, 2001, p. 456).

⁴⁸ Nudd, *Jane Eyre* (p. 42) remarks on the playwrights’ excision of female friends such as Helen Burns, Miss Temple and the Rivers sisters.

not only of Mr Prior and his mother, but also of most of the other women in the play. At one point or another Mrs Fairfax, Blanche Ingram and her mother, Grace Poole and even the madwoman herself warn Jane to leave the house at once, either because of Rochester's known affairs or because of his first marriage. In this version it is Blanche Ingram, who was herself deceived by Rochester, who reveals to Jane the existence of his first wife.

When Blanche describes Rochester as 'a dishonourable, despicable, unprincipled man whose life has been one system of hypocrisy', Jane at first defends him. But when Grace Poole corroborates Blanche's accusations, Jane herself rather startlingly turns against Rochester. In a truly melodramatic scene, where Rochester talks wildly in an attempt to justify himself, Jane grimly repeats one question: 'Is that Woman Your Wife?'. When Rochester finally replies, Jane turns to leave with this parting speech:

what have I to say! but that I have been a poor truthful vain fool, and you have purposed to destroy me, without pity or warning. What have I to say, but that you spread your net well, and I could detect [no] false ring in all your kindness. Oh! Sir, in whom am I to believe, when the one I could have worshipped has proved an enemy? (*Rochester sits with pale face in hands, affected.*) You have done me a bitter wrong, that will follow me through life. Henceforth I'll distrust everything I love, I'll think everything happy must be hollow.

Rochester's punishment in this play is unusually severe. He is subject to wracking pains of conscience, and where Courtney and Willing restore his sight at the end, here there is no mitigation of his injuries, and he is left alone in poverty. The final reconciliation between Jane and Rochester is, as in the novel, entirely between themselves, and despite the final coming together, the point is made that Rochester is not innocent. If he had succeeded in his deception he would have done Jane a real injury.

The change from the saintly hero of the Birch-Pfeiffer plays to the bowed Rochester of Wills's play is striking, and it may be relevant that 1882, the date of Wills's play, saw the culmination of 'The Women's Revolt' – the lengthy and highly-publicized feminist agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. These Acts, intended to check the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, were perceived by feminists as a licence to humiliate and degrade women, since they allowed the police to arrest and examine any woman suspected of being a prostitute. Josephine Butler's campaign to repeal the Acts exposed the fact that apparently respectable men could behave in sexually irresponsible ways with impunity, while the penalties, in terms of disease and opprobrium, were borne by women.

My interpretation of these plays assumes that they act as readings of *Jane Eyre* which incorporate current discourses, whether they be class consciousness, or debate about the financial and sexual situation of women. Such meanings were, however, far from overt, and were not recognized by any contemporary reviewers. About 1848, the time of the first play in this collection, one of Mayhew's costermongers declared that 'love and murder suits us best, sir',⁴⁹ and in 1882, the date of the last play, William

⁴⁹ Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 15.

Archer was complaining that ‘a drama which opens the slightest intellectual, moral, or political question is certain to fail. The public will accept open vice, but it will have nothing to do with a moral problem’.⁵⁰ Michael Booth finds the reason simple:

the Lord Chamberlain and his Examiner of Plays acted throughout our period as governmental arbiters of taste, which is basically why the English drama from 1737 until nearly the twentieth century has not been, and could not be, concerned with sex, politics and religion.⁵¹

‘Sex, politics and religion’ can, however, shape the rhetoric and structure of plays without appearing to pose ‘a moral problem’. Melodrama derives its power not from intellectual debate but from the violent expression of feelings fermented by injustice. Such expression can hardly avoid being ‘political’, though it may require the perspective of another age to interpret its meanings. If, as poststructuralists argue, ideology is most effective when it masquerades as common sense or common knowledge, then the unexamined indignation of the melodrama was a more powerful political medium than the ‘problem plays’ of Archer’s hero, Shaw.

In literary terms, these plays are debased versions of Charlotte Brontë’s novel. Their very distortions, however, may shed light on their famous pre-text. Nowadays we read *Jane Eyre* primarily as the story of an individual remarkable for her inward complexity. The ambiguities of the novel (which can be read as revolutionary or as conservative) contribute to that sense of endless possibilities which is one of the marks of literary greatness. Studies which place the novel in its historical context in terms of the ‘status incongruence’ of governesses, the link between landed British wealth and colonial slavery, or the social causes of female madness, confirm what Terry Eagleton calls the ‘overdetermination’ of the individual’s unique situation at the intersection of class, gender and racial structures.⁵² The Victorian plays, by contrast, simplify and narrow the novel’s focus. In place of a subtly ambiguous Jane we have the stereotypes of melodrama – orphan victim, spotless maiden, ‘astounding woman’. In place of Rochester’s painful dilemma we have the stainless hero of the Birch-Pfeiffer plays or Wills’s culpable deceiver.

These changes of focus, however, can play a temporary spotlight on aspects of the novel which might not otherwise seize our attention. When Courtney aligns his heroine with the servants, it diminishes her individuality, and distorts the realities of class stratification, but its exaggeration of Jane’s lowly status emphasizes her class effrontery in daring to claim equality with the gentry. It is intriguing to speculate whether Lady Eastlake (who wrote her famous review of *Jane Eyre* in the same year

⁵⁰ Quoted in Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 36.

⁵¹ Booth et al., Vol. 6, p. 40. Playwrights subject to the Lord Chamberlain seem to have practised self-censorship; none of the plays in this collection needed censorship apart from substitutions of single words, such as ‘goodness’ for ‘God’ in phrases like ‘Thank God!’.

⁵² Eagleton, p. 8.

as this play) took fright at the story's popularity at the Victoria Theatre, a known Chartist hotbed. Eastlake declares 'that the tone of the mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*'.⁵³ Her denunciation has seemed laughably extreme to modern ears, but Courtney's play, with its comically insolent subversion of authority, shows us how the novel might be read in this way.

Willing's invention of the sub-plot in which John Reed seduces Blanche Ingram similarly reduces these characters to the stock figures of villain and fallen woman; nevertheless this insistent parallel, with its histrionic placing of the fallen woman, highlights for us the enormity of Rochester's deception. In a present-day climate of sexual permissiveness, readers can be impatient with Jane's failure to flout social ostracism and follow her heart. Willing's play insists that we take a hard look at the dangers of illicit union. Wills's play raises even more uncomfortable questions which are wholly overlooked in the novel. A man who has had sexual relations with at least four women of loose virtue (Bertha, Clara, Giacinta and Céline) would have had a good chance of acquiring a sexual disease, and female novelists of a later generation did not shrink from this knowledge.⁵⁴ In 1847 it was impossible for Charlotte Brontë to address this factor, but it is there, submerged in the novel's potential meanings. Wills's play insists that it be placed in the balance, considerably diminishing Rochester's moral status.

Examples such as these show that the relationship between a classic text and its ephemeral derivatives can be as much a dialogue as a one-way traffic, with the lesser work casting back questions for its distinguished pre-text. Indeed, a work like *Jane Eyre*, which impresses us with a sense of its literary value, does so partly because

it has exceeded the conjuncture of its production, has engaged with altered ideological contexts and been reproduced in different contemporary readings. [...] The greater the text, the more we are compelled to read it through a palimpsest of other interpretations.⁵⁵

The plays in this collection have not formed part of any well-known 'palimpsest' of textual accretions around *Jane Eyre* because for more than a hundred years they have rested in the unvisited grave of the British Library's Manuscript Room. Now that they are available, I hope that they will open up new debates about the potential meanings of Charlotte Brontë's text or – at least – about the ways in which her Victorian readers received it.

⁵³ *Quarterly Review* (December 1848) Vol. 84, pp. 153–85, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), in which a young mother dies together with her disfigured baby after contracting a disease from her husband, is a good example.

⁵⁵ Easthope, pp. 57, 59.

Jane Eyre

or

The Secrets of Thornfield Manor

by

John Courtney

1848

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Editor's Notes

The Text

The play exists in a single hand-written copy in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection of Plays in the Manuscript Room of the British Library (Add. MS 43009). The manuscript is written on both sides of small pages of badly browned paper, pasted into a large volume which is numbered consecutively from p. 566; the Courtney play occupies pp. 595–629. The edges of the paper are in good condition and the script is regular and legible. The hand appears the same throughout, although the title page is in a more formal hand. At p. 608 the cream/brown paper gives way to paler, blue/white and less discoloured paper. The manuscript is prefaced by the following letter:

To the Examiner of Theatrical Entertainments:

Sir

With permission of the Lord Chamberlain of Her Majesty's household the accompanying Drama will be represented at the Victoria Theatre on Monday Jan'y 31st next

D W. Osbaldiston

To J.M. Kemble Esq^d

Victoria Theatre

Jan'y 21. 1848

The play is marked as 'Licensed by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, 1848'. The Lord Chamberlain's Day Book has no further information except 'Date of Licence 27: Jan 1848'.

Few of the speeches have final punctuation, and I have introduced final stops, question marks and exclamation marks. Dashes are used more frequently than any other mark, and I have left as many of these as are consistent with intelligibility, but have changed some to commas or full stops. I have introduced some 'bracketting' commas; for instance: 'for the Lowood Institution as they calls it, aint no better' becomes 'for the Lowood Institution, as they calls it, ain't no better'. Where the writer uses commas to create 'comma splices', however, I have substituted a dash as being consistent with his practice elsewhere and less offensive to the modern sense of correctness. I have introduced apostrophes for possessives such as *Jane's* and contractions such as *it's* and *don't*. I have expanded abbreviations and contractions such as *tho'* and *y^d* and have standardized abbreviations of speakers' names. I have removed some capital letters from the middles of sentences. I have substituted 'Joe Joker' for 'Jem Joker' in the first scene, since he is called 'Joe' for the rest of the play.

The Playwright

The author is not named on the manuscript, which was for some time misattributed to John Brougham, despite the fact that the manuscript play is quite different from Brougham's published text. The manuscript does, however, specify a performance at the Victoria Theatre on 31 January 1848, and the New York playbill for that

performance states that ‘The Drama [was] written expressly for this Theatre, by Mr. J. Courtney’ (see Figure 1a).¹

‘John Courtney’ was the author of more than sixty other plays listed in the Lord Chamberlain’s Collection, and the ‘Backstage’ website lists eleven playbills for plays by Courtney. In 1853, he was described as ‘stock author’ for the Surrey Theatre,² which had links with the Victoria through its manager, David Osbaldiston. Boase cites ‘John Courtney’ as the stage name of John Fuller, who was born on 29 August 1804, appeared as an actor at various London theatres between 1829 and 1852, wrote a number of plays for the Olympic, Haymarket and other theatres, and died in Camberwell, London, 17 February 1865.³ H. Davenport Adams, however, records 1813 as Courtney’s date of birth and does not remark on the pseudonym.⁴ Boase does not include *Jane Eyre* in his list of Courtney’s works.

The Theatre and Performances

The only surviving playbills for this play are for the Royal Victoria Theatre, London, on 31 January, 1848, announcing for the ‘First Time, an entirely New Drama (in Four Acts) [...] founded on the Celebrated Work of the same name, by Currer Bell’ (little more than three months after the publication of her novel in October, 1847). An advertisement appeared in *The Era* for two days in February, and Charlotte Brontë speculates about the play in a letter dated 5 February (see ‘Reception’, below).⁵ *The Era* has a further advertisement on 13 February, but the play then disappears.

The Victoria Theatre was built, as the ‘Coburg’, on the south bank of the Thames in 1818, and was renamed ‘Victoria’ in 1833. It was a large theatre, holding more than 2,000 people, built in response to an expansion of population in the area, and also to the improved cross-river access provided by Waterloo Bridge.⁶ Figure 2, ‘View in the New Cut’, shows the theatre surrounded by street vendors, and in 1859, George Sala described the New Cut as ‘one of the most unpleasant samples of London’, its tenements filled with ‘an unwashed, unkempt, wretched humanity’.⁷ John Hollingshead, manager of another theatre, gives this account of an evening at the Old Vic:

¹ There are two surviving playbills: one in NYPLPA: BRTC (Figures 1a and 1b), and a shorter one, not including the name of the playwright, in the University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

² Stephens, *Profession*, p. 96.

³ Boas, Vol. 4, p. 774.

⁴ Adams, Vol. 1, p. 345.

⁵ *Era*, 6 February 1848, p. 8, referring to 8 and 10 February.

⁶ Davis and Emeljanow, pp. 3, 24. Thornbury and Walford say the potential capacity was 2,800 (p. 398).

⁷ Quoted in Davis and Emeljanow, p. 10.

The gallery of the Victoria was a huge amphitheatre, probably containing about fifteen hundred perspiring creatures; most of the men in shirt-sleeves, and most of the women bare-headed, with coloured handkerchiefs round their shoulders, called 'bandanna wipes' in the slang of the district, and probably stolen from the pockets of old gentlemen who were given to snuff-taking. This 'chickaleary' audience was always thirsty – and not ashamed. It tied handkerchiefs together – of which it always seemed to have plenty – until they formed a rope, which was used to haul up large stone bottles of beer from the pit, and occasionally hats that had been dropped below.⁸

Charles Mathews, yet another manager, gives a similar description of how 'the lower orders rush there in mobs' to 'applaud frantically, drink ginger-beer, munch apples, crack nuts, call the actors by their Christian names, and throw them orange-peel and apples by way of bouquets'.⁹

Henry Mayhew, in *London Labour and the London Poor*, gives an extended account of the gallery audience, with vivid details about the noise, the pressure, the stench and the heat. Mayhew deals with the Victoria Theatre in his section on costermongers, since 'three times a week is an average attendance at theatres and dances by the more prosperous costermongers',¹⁰ and 'on a good attractive night, the rush of costers to the threepenny gallery of [...] "the Vic" is peculiar and almost awful'. 'There are few grown-up men that go to the "Vic" gallery', he reports.

The generality of the visitors are lads from about twelve to three-and-twenty, and though a few black-faced sweeps or whitey-brown dustmen may be among the throng, the gallery audience consists mainly of costermongers. Young girls, too, are very plentiful, only one-third of whom now take their babies, owing to the new regulation of charging half-price for infants.¹¹

The prevalence of costermongers in this audience helps to explain the comic scenes in Courtney's play, since costermongers were particularly hostile to the police, who were forever 'moving them on'. Mayhew includes 'Policemen' in his section on 'The Politics of Costermongers', since 'the notion of the police is so intimately blended with what may be called the politics of the costermongers'. Costers, he says, 'are nearly all Chartists', although often 'without understanding anything about the six points', and 'with their opinion of the police, all the more ignorant unite that of the governing power.' The reason why Rochester's aristocratic friends do not appear in Courtney's play may be that such people scarcely appeared on the horizon of this audience:

the costermongers have very vague notions of an aristocracy; they call the more prosperous of their own body 'aristocrats'. Their notions of an aristocracy of birth or wealth seem to be formed on their opinion of the rich, or reputed rich salesmen with whom they deal.

⁸ John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime* (1895), quoted in Booth, J., p. 50.

⁹ Quoted in Baker, p. 399.

¹⁰ Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 15.

¹¹ Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 18.

'THEATRE'
 Rushbrook House, West Brixton, Surrey. (Stage-Manager, Sir L. ...)

It concludes with **ALL THE WEEK**, (Saturday excepted)
THE GREAT PANTOMIME OF THE SEASON
 Written by FRANCISCO FROST, Author of "The Birth of the Steam Engine," &c., and entitled The

WORLD OF WONDERS
 OR
HARLEQUIN
CAXTON
 AND THE
ORIGIN OF PRINTING
THE ABODE OF STUPIDITY,
In the DARKEST DEPTHS OF IGNORANCE
 The Slaves of Stupidity forging the Fetters of Ignorance and Superstition.
 Stupidity, ... (An ancient monastic ... written down as our "Shakspeare.") ... **MR MITCHINSON**
 Prejudice, (the intimate friend of Ignorance and a great admirer of the "good old times") **MR HENDERSON**
 Gradual Dissipation of the Dark Clouds of Ignorance, and Magnificent Appearance
 Intelligence, in her Allegorical Temple. The Power of the Pen!—and

The REALMS of INTELLIGENCE
 Intelligence, (the Parent of Power and the best friend in mankind) **MRS BURDOUGHLIFF**
 Typographical, (the Genius of the Printing-Press—her attendant) **Mrs W. T. HICKS**

THE DOMINION OF THE PRESS.
 Embodying the NEWSPAPER and PERIODICAL LITERATURE of the Day.
 Exterior of Caxton's House, in the Almonry, Westminster

Master William Caxton, ... (the Father of English Printing) ... **Mr J. HOWARD**
 Sir Geoffrey Crinkumcrankum, **Mr F. HENRY**, a ... **Mr PAUL HERRING**
 Wrynkin de Wode, (Caxton's assistant) **Mr FRANKLIN**, ... **Harlequin Mons. LUPINO**
 Alderman Tippetoddy, (of F-rinken Ward—afterwards Pantaloon, **Mr MORELY**
 The Fayre Lad's Rosabelle, (the Belle of St Paul's—afterwards Columbine) **Madlle. ZI ...**

INTERIOR OF CAXTON'S DWELLING.
 Sudden Apparition of **TRUTH** from the Bottom of the Well!
 Truth, (a villainous character who had peered over Waterloo Bridge first, as Truth is very rarely found) **Mrs G. LEE**
 Allegorical Tableau of the Progress of Printing!
 And Diffusion of Knowledge all over the World. News-sheets printed by Steam. Books the great Teachers of Mankind.

Lambythe Marsh in the Olden Time, by Moonlight
 With Ruined Hut of the Ferry and View of the Thames.

EXTERIOR OF CASINO (late National Baths)
 And "Cat and Compasses" Public House.
 Outside of Chandelier and Lamp Warehouse.
With NAVY AGENCY OFFICE.

SHAKSPERE'S HOUSE
 He sees a Man, take him for all in all, we never shall look upon his like again.

Grove's well-known Clothing Mart, Lambeth Emporium
 AND FAMOUS OUT-AND-OUT FITTING WAREHOUSE.
Coffey's Capital Tea Shop, East Lane, Walworth
 And Ticket Writers' Establishment, with Office to let.

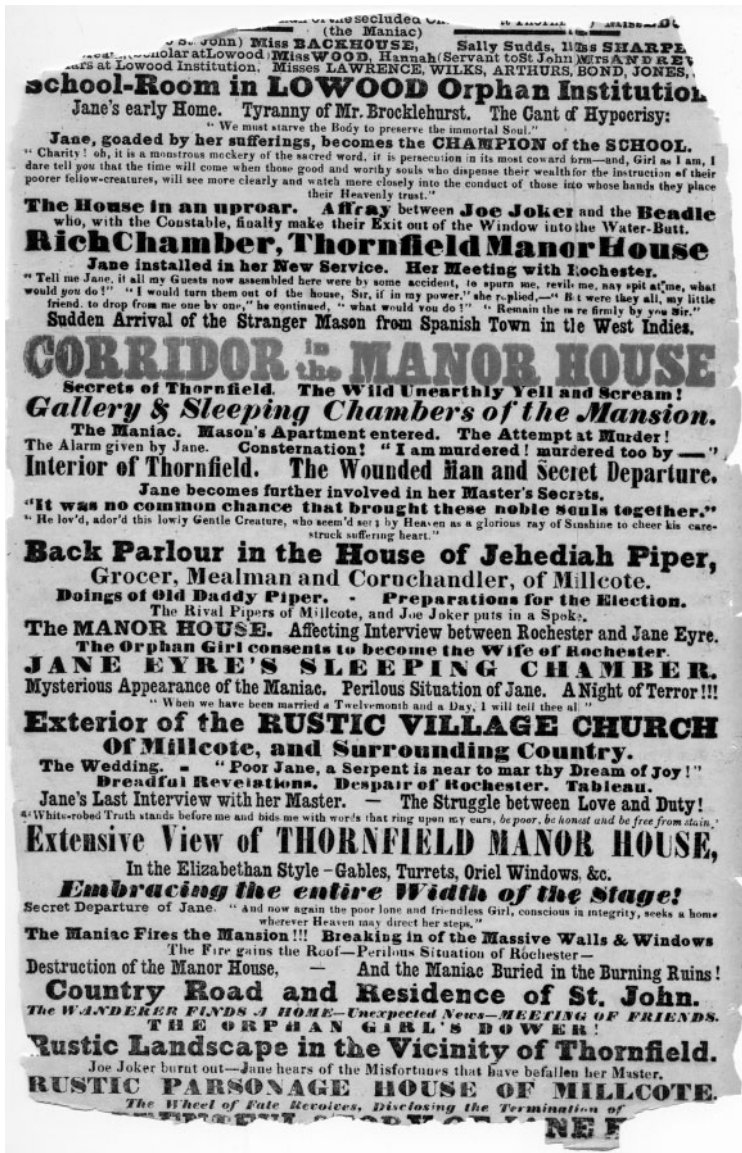


Figure 1b

Playbill for John Courtney's *Jane Eyre* at the Victoria Theatre, 1848, showing the elaborate scene descriptions for which David Osbaldiston, the Victoria Theatre manager, was famous. This unique copy is reproduced by permission of Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

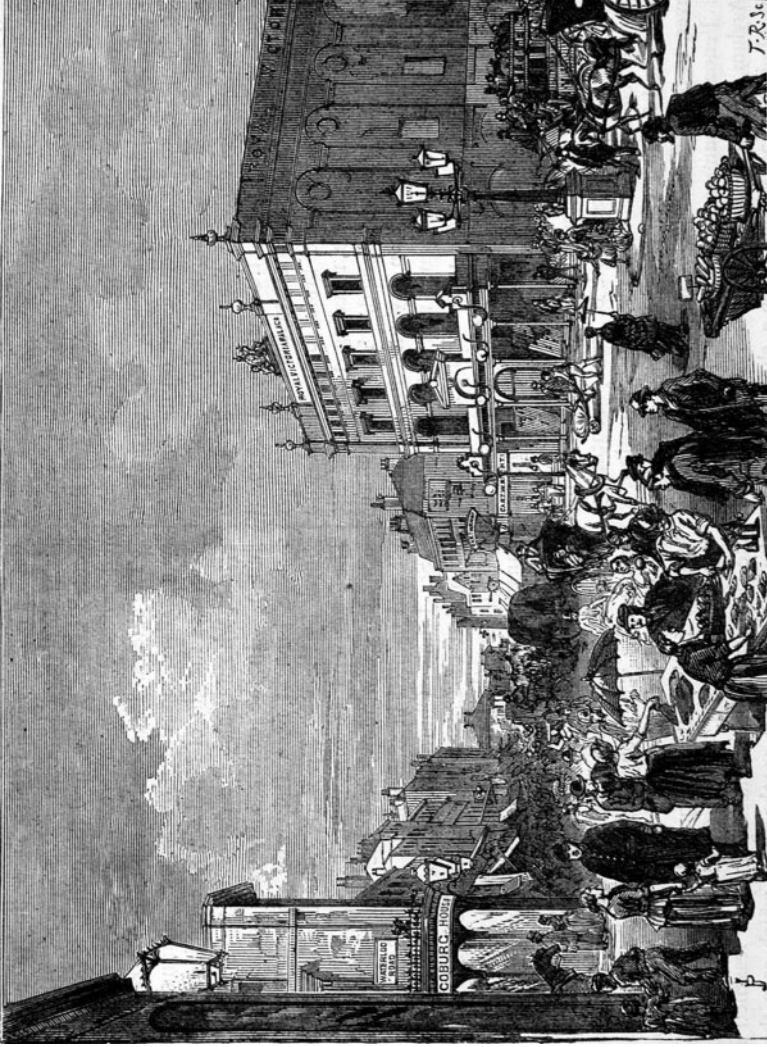


Figure 2

'View in the New Cut', showing the Victoria Theatre as part of a busy street scene: from G. W. Thornbury and E. Walford, Old and New London, 1879. Image supplied by Hull University Photographic Service

Because the police represented power in general, they were the immediate target for political attack; Mayhew is ‘assured that in case of a political riot every “coster” would seize his policeman’.¹² Accordingly, ‘to serve out a policeman is the bravest act by which a costermonger can distinguish himself. Some lads have been imprisoned upwards of a dozen times for this offence; and are consequently looked upon by their companions as martyrs’.¹³

Such an audience would relish Courtney’s humiliation of the constable, the beadle and the self-serving ‘shopman’, Jehediah Piper, and Charles Dickens, in 1850, suggests that the audience was fairly homogenous in class terms (see Figure 3):

The company in the pit were not very clean or sweet-savoured, but there were some good-humoured young mechanics among them, with their wives. These were generally accompanied by ‘the baby’, insomuch that the pit was a perfect nursery. [...] There were a good many cold fried soles in the pit, besides; and a variety of flat stone bottles, of all portable sizes.

The audience in the boxes was of much the same character (babies and fish excepted) as the audience in the pit. A private in the Foot Guards sat in the next box; and a personage who wore pins on his coat instead of buttons, and was in such a damp habit of living as to be quite mouldy, was our nearest neighbour.¹⁴

The Victoria Theatre, together with its neighbour, the Surrey, fostered a theatrical style which West End critics disparagingly called ‘transpontine’ (across the river), and the Victoria Theatre in the 1830s ‘touched new depths in spine-chilling melodrama’.¹⁵ Although its extravagance ‘furnished the burlesque-writer with endless fun’,¹⁶ the managers were also seriously blamed for this low taste, and the management of David Osbaldiston in the 1840s ‘was actually referred to in print as “the most degraded in London”’.¹⁷ Charles Knight, writing in 1846, complains,

Look at our theatres; look at the houses all around them. Have they not given a taint to the very districts they belong to? The Coburg Theatre, now called the Victoria, and the Surrey, what are they? At Christmas time, at each of these minor theatres, may be seen such an appalling amount of loathsome vice and depravity as goes beyond Eugene Sue, and justifies the most astounding revelations of Smollett.¹⁸

In 1847, *The Theatrical Times* complains that the Victoria tries only to please a degraded audience:

¹² Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 20.

¹³ Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 16.

¹⁴ Dickens, p. 14.

¹⁵ Rahill, p. 140.

¹⁶ Baker, p. 399.

¹⁷ Booth, J., p. 52.

¹⁸ Quoted in Booth, J., p. 53.



Figure 3 The audience at the Victoria Theatre. This drawing shows the audience reflected in the famous 'looking-glass curtain' in 1822, when the theatre was called the Coburg. The mirror curtain had gone by 1848, when *Jane Eyre* was performed there, but the class division of the audience by gallery, circle and pit was still in force. Reproduced by permission of the The Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library

The vulgar and the ignorant, such as those who throng to the Victoria to witness atrocious melodramas fit only for an audience of felons, care not what an actor is so long as he is but vociferous and tears a passion to rags. If a fellow without sense or education can but bellow like a coster-monger, it is sufficient to please in that elegant locality.¹⁹

In 1850, however, Dickens uses the very first issue of *Household Words* to defend the theatres, and the Victoria in particular, arguing that theatregoing is beneficial for an uneducated audience:

Joe Whelks, of the New Cut, Lambeth, is not much of a reader, has no great store of books, no very commodious room to read in, no very decided inclination to read, and no power at all of presenting vividly before his mind's eye what he reads about. But, put Joe in the gallery of the Victoria Theatre; show him doors and windows in the scene that will open and shut, and that people can get in and out of; tell him a story with these aids, and by the help of live men and women dressed up, confiding to him their innermost secrets, in voices audible half a mile off; and Joe will unravel a story through all its entanglements, and sit there as long after midnight as you have anything left to show him. Accordingly, the Theatres to which Mr Whelks resorts, are always full; and whatever changes of fashion the drama knows elsewhere, it is always fashionable in the New Cut.²⁰

By 1859, George Sala surprisingly describes Victoria's plays as 'highly healthful and beneficial',²¹ and despite the adverse opinions, it is possible to attribute this positive change to the efforts of David Osbaldiston and Eliza Vincent, local actors who managed the theatre from 1841. Vincent was to play the lead parts in both *Susan Hopley*, the management's big success, and in Courtney's version of *Jane Eyre*.²² Under Osbaldiston, the Victoria became famous for homely melodrama and (in his own words) 'the Representation of those Affecting Scenes of Real Life, which come so closely and so touchingly home to the Hearts of all'.²³ He

recognized that this playhouse stood in the middle of one of London's roughest and most squalid neighbourhoods. Its only hope of survival lay in giving a tough local public theatrical goods that had no pretensions of passing over their heads. [He] inaugurated a house policy that was at least consistent in that the theatre became known as the home of domestic melodrama (more properly melodramas of domestics) like *Susan Hopley*, or *The Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl* and *Mary Clifford, the Foundling Apprentice Girl*.²⁴

¹⁹ Quoted in Booth, J., p. 54.

²⁰ Dickens, p. 13.

²¹ Quoted in Davis and Emeljanow, p. 10.

²² After Osbaldiston's death in 1851, Vincent managed the theatre alone (Davis and Emeljanow, p. 36). Howard says Osbaldiston was manager '29.9.1843–7.1.1851' (Howard, p. 164). Osbaldiston was born in 1794; Vincent was born in 1815 and died, as Mrs Benjamin Crowther, in 1856 (Wearing).

²³ Quoted in Booth, J., p. 49.

²⁴ Roberts, p. 26.

Susan Hopley (1841), by G. Dibdin Pitt, was the play which established a reputation for Osbaldiston and Vincent, and its success explains the prominence of the servant characters in Courtney's *Jane Eyre*.

Jane Eyre was Osbaldiston's swan-song at the Vic, according to John Booth, who reports that it 'had good scenery and "some really excellent acting"'.²⁵ A unique copy of Osbaldiston's playbill survives in the New York Public Library (see Figures 1a and 1b). It shows that *Jane Eyre* was in a supporting role to 'The Great Pantomime of the Season [-] World of Wonders or Harlequin Caxton and the Origin of Printing', presenting 'The Abode of Stupidity', 'The Dominion of the Press', 'Shakspeare's House' and so on. The scene painter and the maker of the stage machinery are given the same prominence as the playwright. Osbaldiston's playbills were 'long flimsy sheets with plenty of big black lettering',²⁶ and a former audience member recalls that

however gingerly you handled those bills some of the black came off on you, and so it happened that when you wiped away a sympathetic tear with your finger you frequently left a black streak down your cheek. I once saw the audience turn out of the 'Old Vic' – after the performance of an old-fashioned drama of the weepy-weepy order, and the faces of the crowd were a study in black and white.²⁷

These playbills were also famous for their detail and for their emotional exhortations. The playbill for *Susan Hopley* invited the audience to 'look around, and behold the moist tear of compassion, flowing from the o'ercharged heart. Who can restrain these, the best feelings of our nature, at the representation of such Domestic Woe?'²⁸ The large playbill for *Jane Eyre*, originally printed in red and black, gives not only an extended synopsis of the plot, but also exclamatory descriptions of the different scenes of the play, emphasizing the spectacle presented by grand rooms and broad landscapes, with quotations from the play and summaries of its moral dilemmas – 'Perilous Situation of Jane!'; 'A Night of Terror!!!'; 'The Struggle between Love and Duty!'

Charles Kingsley described Osbaldiston's Old Vic as 'a licensed pit of darkness, a trap of temptation, profligacy and ruin, triumphantly yawning night after night', where prostitutes were freely allowed into the theatre, and Peter Roberts argues that 'in the light of these known facts, Osbaldiston's long-winded playbills', with their references to domestic virtue, 'positively radiate hypocrisy'.²⁹ Edwin Fagg, on the other hand, claims that 'the Vic became the recognized scapegoat in theatrical London for publicists who probably were never inside the theatre'.³⁰

Fagg suggests that 'the domestic dramas were really one way of utilizing Miss

²⁵ Booth, J., pp. 51–2.

²⁶ Booth, J., p. 55.

²⁷ George R. Sims, 'My Life' (1916), quoted in Booth, J., p. 55.

²⁸ Quoted in Fagg, p. 85.

²⁹ Roberts, pp. 26–7.

³⁰ Fagg, p. 98.

Vincent'. Vincent, who played the part of Jane, had been on the stage since the age of eight³¹ and was an actress of some repute. H. Barton Baker (1904) confirms that although the 'suburban minor theatres' such as the Victoria 'arose at a time when the histrionic art was a mere bundle of traditions and conventionalities', nevertheless many of their actors 'possessed considerable real dramatic power'. Miss Vincent, according to Baker, 'might have stood beside' the best West End performers.³²

Reception of the Play

The Era predictably compares this *Jane Eyre* with Osbaldiston's great success, *Susan Hopley*, and also invokes the current scandal about 'the Yorkshire schools' by comparing Lowood School with 'Mr Squeers's establishment' (in *Nicholas Nickleby*). The review consists mostly of a summary of the plot, emphasizing that Rochester 'would have perished but for the exertions of his faithful servant Joe Joker'. It concludes that the play is 'certain to be attractive', since 'Miss Vincent as Jane, played well throughout, "The Heroine of Domestic Drama" having exactly the part to suit her; she displayed much feeling and good taste, and was loudly applauded'. Part of the 'attractiveness', however, is clearly of a lower kind: 'There is, of course, a comic underplot, in which Joe Joker and Betty Buner [sic] keep the house in a roar'.³³ This review suggests that the play was relatively successful, especially when compared with the attitudes of 'the most intelligent man' that Mayhew met among the costermongers, who said that 'love and murder suits us best, sir'; they liked tragedy, but 'the high words in a tragedy we call jaw-breakers, and say we can't tumble to that barrikin'.³⁴ Mayhew's conclusion is that 'the "Vic" gallery is not to be moved by sentiment', and he gives numerous examples to show that 'they prefer vigorous exercise to any emotional speech'.³⁵ Edwin Fagg, however, gives a long account of the staging and reception of *Susan Hopley* which suggests that the tastes of the audience did include sentiment.³⁶

There is, alas, no record of the account written of Courtney's play for Charlotte Brontë herself by William Smith Williams, who had been a theatre critic before joining the firm of Smith, Elder and Co. (Charlotte's publishers), and offered to see the play and report on it to her. Charlotte speculates that

A representation of 'Jane Eyre' at a Minor Theatre would no doubt be a rather afflicting spectacle to the author of that work: I suppose all would be wofully exaggerated and painfully vulgarized by the actors and actresses on such a stage. What – I cannot help asking myself – would they make of Mr Rochester? And the picture my fancy conjures up

³¹ Fagg, pp. 87, 100.

³² Baker, p. 354.

³³ *Era*, 6 February 1848, p. 11.

³⁴ Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 15.

³⁵ Mayhew, Vol. 1, p. 19.

³⁶ Fagg, p. 86.

by way of reply is a somewhat humiliating one. What would they make of Jane Eyre? I see something very pert and very affected as an answer to that query.³⁷

Although Williams's description of Courtney's *Jane Eyre* seems to be lost, we do have Charlotte's response to it. She said, 'you... have shewn me a glimpse of what I might call *loathsome*, but which I prefer calling *strange*. Such then is a sample of what amuses the Metropolitan populace! Such is a view of one of their haunts!'³⁸

Distinctive Features of the Play

- There is an additional invented cast of comic servant characters and Betty Bunce has her virtue threatened by a comic, predatory shopman.
- The aristocrats, though mentioned, do not appear.
- Jane is a teacher at Lowood at the start; there is much emphasis on the scandal of school management.
- Coverage is fairly complete, including the Rivers family.
- The servant, Joe, rescues Rochester from the fire.
- Richard Mason runs mad at the end to provide a little business.
- Rochester's sight is restored.

³⁷ Smith, Vol. 2, p. 25.

³⁸ Smith, Vol. 2, p. 27.

Jane Eyre by John Courtney

Act I

Scene 1

Schoolroom

Betty Bunce discovered

Betty: Dear me, what a life is mine – servant of all work to a charity school – for the Lowood Institution, as they calls it, ain't no better than a charity school – £15 won't pay the board and teaching of they poor girls, so they makes the rest up by subscriptions and such like – poor things. I'm afraid most of our scholars are not sent to be educated – they are sent out of the way by fathers and mothers that can't very well account for their being in the way – or else the poor things are orphans with cruel uncles and aunts who send them out of the way to be thumped, bumped and consumptionized – they none of them look half-fed and half-fed they are not either.

Enter Joe Joker

Betty: Well, Joe, how do you get on?

Joe: Not at all and it ain't very likely I shall, if I don't get out of this.

Betty: It's not very promising living here, is it?

Joe: You've heard of Buchan's Domestic Medicine haven't you? Well that tells you how to kill yourself without paying a doctor to do it; this is Domestic Transportation – visiting Botany Bay or Norfolk Island without crossing the herring pond.

Betty: What have you got there?

Joe: Oh this is the bread basket – here's slices, here's a breakfast for a growing girl after an hour's run in the grounds on a frosty morning, washed down too with a basin of burnt skilagilee.

Betty: Why it's horrid!

Joe: And yet Mr Naomi Brocklehurst, the manager and treasurer, calls himself a saint.

Betty: He's a tall, lanky, parchment-skinned, frowning old hunks.

Joe: I'll give warning – I can't stand it any longer. Look at this jacket and this waistcoat – would you believe that they were once a fit? They hang, Betty, and if I stay here another month I shall have to have a shirt covered with fish-hooks to hang em by. I shall cut the Lowood Institution – if I don't I shall die of domestic starvation – I shan't see the world. Therefore I'm determined to make a rush and get out before I go out like a rush light. *(Exit)*

Betty: Hang me if I don't follow his example – what's £5 a year and no perquisites and half starved into the bargain? I like that Joe Joker – I wonder if he has ever thought of taking a wife? (*Bell*) Oh, there's the warning for breakfast and here comes the young girl Jane Eyre they made teacher of, because she had no friends to go to when she had done all her learning – good morning, Miss.

Enter Jane Eyre

Jane: Good morning. I see everything is ready.

Betty: Yes Miss, I've swept and dusted, and Jem has brought in the bread – Poor thing, how pale and serious she looks – ah, she has long borne a heavy heart. (*Exit*)

Jane: Cold and chill, will my spirit bear on this bleak and cheerless fate? Infancy passed in a dull lethargy – girlhood encountering every day the frowns and scoffs of those who should have cherished and caressed me, and now womanhood dawns with a still darker prospect. Eight years have passed away since as a care-stricken child I quitted my aunt Reed for this place and from that hour, no friendly letter or inquiry has reached me – no mother's caress or father's kindly regard lives in my memory. I am as one dead to the world save that I live and move, for even my aunt sent with me evil reports, painted me in the blackest dye to Mr Brocklehurst. Oh, what hope have I but in flight – should my advertisement for a situation fail I must linger here till death shall end my suffering – they come – let me dry my tears.

Enter Schoolgirls – Miss Temple – Miss Scatchard

Miss Temple: Monitors, bring in the breakfast. (*The oldest girls bring in bowls and hand them round etc.*) Monitors, serve out the bread.

Girl: What horrible stuff!

Others: Dreadful!

Miss Scatchard: Silence, girls, or I'll report you to the Manager – how dare you, Miss, turn up your nose at such healthy and nourishing food!

Enter Betty

Betty: If you please, Miss Temple, Mr Naomi Brocklehurst is coming to visit the school – his carriage is at the door.

Miss Scatchard: Girls, finish your breakfast and prepare yourselves to greet your benefactor with propriety – teacher Jane Eyre, take your slate and note complaints with orders for amendment.