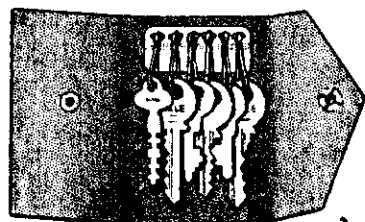


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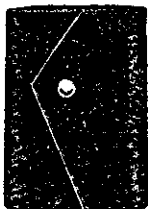


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"Jane Eyre" for Nelson Listeners

JANE EYRE, the novel by Charlotte Brontë, has been adapted for the BBC by Barbara Couper and produced by her husband, Howard Rose. Recordings of the production have been received by the NZBS and will be heard first by Nelson listeners, starting at 8.23 p.m. on Sunday, April 13.

The part of Jane is played by Belle Chrystall, and Rochester is played by Reginald Tate. There are 11 instalments. The serial was broadcast to British listeners last year, and was introduced to readers of the *Radio Times* by Alan Dent.

It is just over a century since Charlotte Brontë was rapidly, secretly, feverishly writing *Jane Eyre* at Haworth (said Mr. Dent). Her father lay blind in a dark room, her brother was a hopeless drunken reprobate, her two sisters were both preoccupied with their own first novels. A book of "Poems, by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell" had fallen stillborn from the press in that same year, 1846.

Undismayed, the three sisters sat in different rooms in the same house, possessed by their pens.

With the completed manuscript Charlotte sent this note to her publishers:

I now send you per rail a MS. entitled "*Jane Eyre*," a novel in three volumes by Currer Bell. I find I cannot prepay the carriage of the parcel, as money for that purpose is not received at the small station-house where it is left. If when you acknowledge the receipt of the MS., you would have the goodness to mention the amount charged on delivery, I will immediately transmit it in postage stamps. It is better in future to address Mr. Currer Bell, under cover to "Miss Brontë, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire," as there is a risk of letters otherwise directed not reaching me at present. To save trouble, I enclose an envelope.

The note is like herself—staid, serious, prim—but with no inkling of that fire which was in her eye, in her spirit, and in her novel.

The unconventional burning tale of a governess, who loved and was loved by the father of her charge, burst like a bombshell on the early-Victorian reading public. Many were shocked. The *Quarterly Review* said of Jane that "no Christian grace is perceptible upon her," and went on: "If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, it must be to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex."

Such notices helped even more than the panegyrics. Thackeray championed *Jane Eyre* and enthused in the right quarters. George Eliot observed, rather sourly, in a letter to a friend: "The book is interesting, only I wish the characters would talk a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports." But later critics have leapt up the general chorus of merited praise: "Here was a sweep of tragic passion, a broad delineation of elementary hatred and love, a fusion of romantic intrigue with grave and sinister landscape, such as had never been experienced before," says one. Andrew Lang found in it "plenty of good, old-fashioned, foolish, immortal romance." Augustine Birrell wrote: "Most books are born dead, and it is always a startling moment when you first discover that you are

holding an exception in your hands. *Jane Eyre* was a live coal dropped by some unknown hand—from some unknown quarter."

Despite manifold pomposities in the dialogue and manifest absurdities in the plot (Mr. Rochester, for example, has no qualm whatever about bigamy when he suggests marriage to Jane, though he still has a mad wife hidden in an attic), the novel retains to-day its curious, sombre, passionate power. Its faults are all and always consumed in the white-hot flame of sincerity that seems to leap out of the pages. To reopen *Jane Eyre* is to reopen the door of a growling, glowing furnace. Even to-day, after a hundred years.

It remains one of the most widely read novels of any period. It is found on every bookshelf (most especially in the North of England) that can call itself a bookshelf. Perhaps the secret of its appeal is that it gives an immediate, wildly romantic answer to the young heart's clamour for colour and requital, for 'covert and the night-ingle' (in Meredith's phrase and meaning). And then, of course, the strength, suppleness, and finesse of the book's style act as a great preservative of its quality and fame. It has pattern. It is planned with considerable craft. (Its opening sentence, for example, is an unsurpassed invitation to sit down indoors on a wet afternoon and enjoy a novel: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.") Through it all shines the proud spirit of Charlotte, identifying herself with Jane, giving the book its genius. Jane is forever Charlotte.

When, at the height of her book's triumph, "Currer Bell" chose to come south on business, it must have seemed, even to those who already guessed her to be a woman, that this was little Jane Eyre herself walking into London's drawing-rooms. "She was not only unspoiled by her sudden and prodigious fame, but obviously unspoilable," observed Harriet Martineau. George Eliot again, in another and later letter, said: "Lewen was describing Currer Bell to me yesterday as a little, plain, provincial, sickly-looking old maid! Yet what passion, what fire is in her!" She reminded Thackeray of Joan of Arc in search of her Dauphin. And Thackeray's daughter, Lady Ritchie, has left a vivid pen-picture of Charlotte coming into her father's house: "She enters in mittens, in silence, in seriousness; our hearts are beating with wild excitement." Little Miss Thackeray, you see, had been rapidly, secretly, feverishly, reading *Jane Eyre*.

Morning Song

I GRANT, my love, you drive our car
As skillfully as I;
And that your contract bridge is sound
Of course, I won't deny.
You sew, you bake, you golf, you dance
With rhythm, grace and life.
I'd choose you for my pin-up girl
Although you are my wife.
Before your charm I kneel, my sweet,
But still (forgive this boast)
A man must have a straighter eye
Than you, when cutting toast.
And when you wave the knife I watch
The sagging loaf with dread.
So really, dear, I must insist,
You let ME cut the bread!

—M. D. Webster



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