



[Jane Eyre](#) at [Cornerhouse](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) September 2011

It is said that there are only seven stories, everything else is merely an adaptation of our founding human myths. Jane Eyre is the story of a poor and plain woman who finds independence and love, albeit with the wrong man (although we in the audience know that they are destined for each other). In a contemporary chick flick, Jane would be beautiful, although wearing glasses or unfashionable clothes, and would be transformed by designer labels, as well as love. In Charlotte Bronte's novel, and this faithful adaptation, Jane remains true to herself and shows the audience that even though she is 'little, plain and poor', she deserves a fulfilling life.

This film is directed by the young American Cary Joji Fukunaza and stars the young Australian Mia Wasikowska, the German-Irish Michael Fassbender and a galaxy of British stars, places Jane at the centre of the story – the true protagonist in her own story. And for recent viewers of 'One Day', the accents in this are flawless.

The opening scenes of Jane walking through a storm on the moors and the flashbacks to her deprived childhood emphasize the gothic roots of the story where a heavy handed religious teaching terrifies the child with visions of hell. But Jane is a survivor in a society where her lack of beauty, money and social position mark her out for the role of governess – shunned and mocked by upper class women and open to sexual exploitation from her employer – a possibility

that she is warned against by Judi Dench's housekeeper.



Working as a governess in Thornfield Hall in the delightful and wild Yorkshire countryside, Jane becomes fascinated by the mysterious and charismatic Mr Rochester – and by the strange sounds which disturb her sleep. As Jane falls in love she retains her dignity and independence. As a woman she is conscious of the dangerous path she is treading, as Rochester is the first in literature's tradition of the dark, fascinating and dangerous hero. In their strange courtship she beats him with her self-possession and verbal dexterity in the face of his teasing. It is this dignity and self-respect which wins his love in the face of the shallow, beauties who court him.

But as we suspect there is a secret that will destroy their plans of marriage and threaten the lives of our hero and heroine. As we move between this romance and the new life that Jane is building for herself with the vicar, Jamie Bell and his sisters who have rescued her from the storm, we see how Jane has created a new family and a dignified and worthy life as a teacher of the poor. The death of a relative gives her the finances to secure her freedom, but she chooses to share her good fortune and continue to lead a good and independent life. It is only when her money and the terrible fate that has befallen Rochester make them equals, that they can truly share love.

This is a beautiful and flawlessly acted adaptation, with a moving score by Dario Marianelli, and unlike in previous films Jane is the true hero and Wasikowaska gives a moving and restrained performance. My one criticism in that staying true to the novel, the film does not tap into the erotic and passionate depths which are seen more clearly in the work of Charlotte's sister Emily, and doubtless, in the new film of Wuthering Heights. It is a little too restrained, reminiscent of a Sunday afternoon television adaptation – and it is indeed a BBC production.

In this elegant and faithful adaptation, and of Charlotte Bronte's own story of overcoming life's obstacles with dignity and grace, a little more wild passion would not have gone amiss.

There's a relatively short showing period at the Cornerhouse for this film, so in summary I'd urge you to GO SEE THIS FILM whilst it's still on.