

Tedium reversed

Pride & Prejudice at TUFA

And so, with not much on the Luxembourg dramatic horizon for some while, it was off to Trier for the English Drama Group's sparkling production of *Pride and Prejudice* at the Tuchfabrik ('Tufa'). If this presentation was typical, then missing Trier in the past has missed many a treat.

There are of course many ways of approaching Jane Austen: as a giant literary figure, a social commentator, a pre-feminist, an early romantic, an opportunity for costumiers and designers to strut their stuff. Or, as here, you can go for the laughs.

That isn't meant to be disrespectful. In fact it comes as a relief after – it has to be faced – the somewhat tedious BBC TV drama series treatment. For Miss Austen was a very witty writer, and the adapter here (Christoph Nonn, who also directed) stuck closely to her dialogue, with only a few narrative interludes from Jane herself (Elke Nonn) to bring it in under two and a half hours. He claims 98% of the text is Austen's own words: I believe him.

Overall, the effect is best described as 'Wildean'. The yet-to-be-born ghost of Oscar stalks Hertfordshire, where Mr Bennett (Sebastian Schmitt) copes manfully and sardonically with the flood of femininity represented by the impossible Mrs Bennett (Victoria Bützler) and their five daughters, all convinced of that familiar universal truth that a single man in possession of a fortune is in want of a wife. And needs to be convinced of it.



As usual poor Jane (Bennett, not the author: Swaantje Siebke) has her heart broken by Mr Bingley (Thomas Wahrlich - remarkably convincing) who is misled by his sister (Annika Toll, suitably euphemistically witty) and the despicable D'Arcy (Lukas Tillman) who is therefore hated by a very self-possessed Lizzie Bennett (Lisa Keimburg) who refuses the advances of the reverend Mr Collins (very funny indeed performance by Manuel Anghel) who therefore marries their friend Charlotte (Caroline Schröter) much to the dismay of Mary Bennett (Sabine Lambert, possessor of the most heartrending sobs), while



Lydia and Kitty Bennett (Kristina Heitzer and Jennifer Lewandowski) giggle convincingly (this was no night for misogynists) in the background until Lydia runs off with the scoundrelly soldier Mr Wickham (Christian Marx) threatening to disgrace the family completely until a glorious *deus ex machina* in the shape of a converted D'Arcy saves everything.

And everybody manages to live happily and wittily ever after, as even Oscar would have approved, with the possible exception of Lady de Burgh, an imperious Jessica Whiteley in the Lady Bracknell mould, all of whose dynastic schemes are foiled.

Costumes? Impeccable, apart from Collins' Lutheran bands. Sets? Reasonably minimalist and self-effacing. Music? Contemporaneous and appropriate. Accents? Mostly almost unnoticeable. Mrs Bennett sounded German but one likes the idea that Mrs Bennett is perhaps not actually English. D'Arcy was also a little stiffly Germanic, but far be it from me to understand the appeal to adolescent femininity of all ages of the deplorable D'Arcy, so it may have been advantageous. There was much ingenious business, but the purest piece of theatrical legerdemain came with the eventual proposals of marriage, both of which were played in mime.

There have been many attempts to adapt the novel to the theatre. I don't see how anyone could do it much better than this. My congratulations to everyone. And my recommendation to watch out for future productions by the group.

