

Bronte, the play

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Bronte, the play, is a recent work, with one of its very first productions being staged at the Oxford Playhouse. The idea of it was to provide the audience with an insight into the lives of the three Bronte sisters, Emily, Charlotte and Anne. They of course wrote books themselves, including *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. Renowned of course for being secluded, they wrote at a time when women writers were scorned by publishers; their only way of expressing themselves was indeed through their work. However, whilst the play was written by Polly Teale so that it showed the hardship that the sisters each had to endure in order to have their work published, I will be seeing whether the performers helped this any further.

Right from the very start, we as an audience were given a different view on the actual play. The three sisters were in fact standing on stage in normal modern day clothing. They said at this point that they did not want the audience to believe this as a real play, and that they were just playing the Brontes- and in doing so showing the audience very similar to what their life may have been like. This belief was extremely effective, as it was interesting. It was interesting because it allowed the audience to genuinely watch the play almost like a critic and see the ways in which the actors and actresses depicted the lives of the Brontes and of those around them.

The most noticeable connection between the actresses was, I thought, how close they actually appeared as sisters. This was especially well done as for most of the play when one was in a scene, the other two would almost certainly be there. They were indeed united on all fronts, such as the way in which they tried to stand up to their father. Also, there seemed to be an informal pecking order within the sisters. Diane Beck and Fenella Woolgar,

playing Emily and Charlotte respectively, seemed to be vying for the dominance, whilst Anne (Catherine Cusack) was very much the 'other' sister. Woolgar and Beck were excellent in highlighting this. Later on we will see this rivalry between the sisters in their writing. However, this bond showed that whilst they undoubtedly loved and cared for their father very much, their bond was simply too tight. This was effective; and this was due to the actresses.

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All of the actresses here created this in their own ways; Beck did so by trying convey her Emily as the leader of the pack- Woolgar did the same also and as well as this tried, and succeeded in creating a rivalry between the two of them.

Cusack's Anne. However this bond was not shared with their brother Bramwell. Both he and his sisters felt that the other side had wasted their lives. Bramwell felt that his sisters had no life, confined to the house, and the sisters felt on the other hand that Bramwell was shallow, as his life consisted of little more than drink. This tension reared its head finally in one scene in particular. This was where he pinned Emily down on the floor and taunted her of the fact that she was still a virgin. This was extremely well done as at a couple of points during the scene, the audience were unsure as to whether Bramwell was actually about to rape his own sister. The other sisters were of course torn between stepping and protecting Emily, as possibly getting roughed up themselves, or simply standing by and watching Bramwell. We can see this emotion on the stage as the sisters deliberate what to do; such

was the quality of the acting that was portrayed by their bond. Yet, it is interesting to note that Charlotte was in fact the more reluctant of the two other sisters to in fact go and aid Emily- this added further spice to the plot.

Also, however, Emily translated this pain through her own writing into her books. She believed that this helped to channel her anger, and therefore by doing this she showed that she was indeed feeling better. This reflected itself onto the audience, and their own particular feelings regarding the attack.

The most important character in the play except for the sisters is undoubtedly Bertha. Although not an actual person in the play, she represented the feelings and anxieties of all of the sisters within the play. One prominent part was straight after the sex attack where Bertha was mirroring the anxieties of Emily. Bertha called out 'He beat me, he beat me like a dog'. She cried in a moaning voice too. The actress playing Bertha was perhaps the most accomplished, despite being just 20. She played 'Ellie' in *About a Boy* also. Her experience shone through as well; she was not afraid to moan, and to move fluidly like a snake as she did, and this was good as this contradicted the rest of the play. It added a sense of realism, as we were truly allowed to see into the deep thoughts of both Emily and of Charlotte.

Another important part with this 'character' was at the very end of the play. At this part, she throws feathers everywhere across. Throughout the play at certain she had thrown small handfuls on stage. However, it seemed as though at the end she was letting all of her emotion and stress out on stage, as though she had finally exploded with anger. It appeared as though she had literally gone mad also. The actress here was extremely effective, not

only because her actual action was so random, but also because the way which she so carelessly threw away the feathers was good as it showed that she also seemed to know not what she was doing, just like Charlotte or Emily letting the ink ooze from their pen onto the page.

Thus in conclusion it could be said that whilst the play of Bronte itself was indeed extremely thought-provoking and even gain an entertaining into the lives of the Bronte sisters, it was undoubtedly the performers who made this possible, through their own separate ways. The skills required needed to be of the highest quality. The performers had this; and thus made the production effective.