

SHARED
EXPERIENCE

BRONTË

by Polly Teale

Education Pack by Gillian King

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BRONTË

by Polly Teale

THE PACK

This pack is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing a performance of BRONTË. I've included background material, such as the history and culture of the time, and also information specifically on our production; which includes interviews with the creative team.

Although this cannot be an exhaustive account of the whole production, I hope that it introduces some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. Scattered through the pack are questions and exercises that I hope will be useful to provoke discussion and practical work of your own.

Gillian King



Anne, Emily and Charlotte Brontë by Branwell Brontë



Bad News by George Hicks

COMPANY CREDO

At the heart of our work is the POWER and EXCITEMENT of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience – a SHARED EXPERIENCE. We are committed to creating a theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.

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SHARED EXPERIENCE EXPRESSIONISM

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place feels like than what it realistically looks like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house feels like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

Polly Teale



Polly Teale

‘During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over.’

ADVICE FOR YOUNG LADIES

In the years between 1785 and 1820 a large number of books were printed giving advice on the education and conduct of young ladies.

The advice books were designed to be bought by parents, teachers and clergymen to be given to young ladies.

During this time, it was asserted or assumed that women were weaker in body and mind than men. The prime female virtues were modesty, faithfulness, prudence, delicacy, and humility. The prime role was in the home, to give support and comfort to families and husbands.

It was recommended that women needed to exercise restraint in virtually every aspect of life, in society, in home, socialising or dealing with tradesmen. Reading needed to be closely controlled by husbands and parents.

The advice books were fearful of novels which were believed to:

'inflare emotions and cause discontent. Avoid such works, as to enervate the mind, soften the heart, or awaken the passions'
from *Maternal Letters*, Mrs Chapone.

'The indiscriminate reading of such books corrupts more female hearts than any other cause whatsoever'.

The Reverend Fordyce, another advice book author wrote;

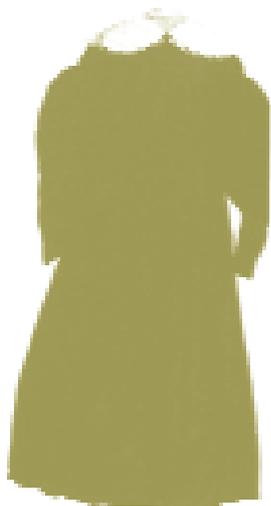
'There are very few novels that can be read with safety, a woman who reads such novels must in her soul be a prostitute'.

Mrs John Sandford wrote in *Women in her Social and Domestic Character* in the 1830's:

'A woman may make a man's home delightful, and may thus increase his motives for virtuous exertion. She may refine and tranquilize his mind – may turn away his anger, or allay his grief. Where want of congeniality impairs domestic comfort the fault is generally chargeable on the female side: for it is the woman, not for the man to make the sacrifice, especially in indifferent matters. She must, in a certain degree, be plastic herself, if she would mould others, and this is one reason why very good women are sometimes very uninfluential. They do a great deal, but they yield nothing...

In everything that women attempt, they should show their consciousness of dependence. There is something so unpleasant in female self-sufficiency, that it not infrequently prejudices instead of persuading.

Their sex should ever teach them to be subordinate: and they should remember that, by them, influence is to be obtained, not by assumption, but by a delicate appeal to affection or principle. Women, in this respect, are something like children: the more they show their need of support, the more engaging they are.'



These four dresses are said to have been worn by Charlotte

EXERCISE:

Deportment was considered very important in the nineteenth century. Your posture, your grace and your ability to look good in all situations revealed your upbringing and class. Women all wore corsets and some men wore them as well to improve their figures!

In rehearsals the movement director Leah Hausman worked with the cast on deportment. The cast put on corsets, long skirts, fitted tops and bonnets or hats. They were reminded that it was not ladylike to show ankles and so on, and Leah asked them to first of all walk around the room. She then added extra difficulties to the task. For example: you are late for church, you have to climb up a steep path or up onto a rock (imagine being on the moors) or you have to lower yourself into a rowing boat. How do you do this and still look elegant and 'proper'?

In pairs or small groups, choose one person to be the movement director or deportment specialist. It is their job to spot and correct any inappropriate movements or displaying of flesh! The others in the group should try to create Victorian costumes, either by using real costumes, or for a corset, wrap some tight material around you, drape material to create a long skirt and so on. It's not important that it looks authentic, just that it provides you with the restrictions that the Brontë family would have had to live with.

Walk around the room, then add difficulties or challenges as Leah did, change the weather as well – what happens then?

At one point *Jane Eyre* protests,

'Women are supposed to be very calm: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their own efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags...'

In the extract below from Brontë, Emily and Anne discuss how women were treated and viewed.

- Emily:** And you? You said in your letter you had finished the first chapter.
- Anne:** I cannot promise it has any merit beyond that it saved my sanity. But even that is not yet certain. You will have to let me know in a day or two.
- Emily:** What is it about?
- Anne:** A woman who is married and bound for life to a drunken adulterer. I intend it as provocation to those that would have women treated as children. The more I see the more I am certain we ruin both girls and boys by insisting on the frailty of our sex. While young men must endlessly prove themselves, we are kept like over grown infants in the nursery of life, our talents wasted, our energy squandered on meaningless tasks, peering out at a world we will never know...'

Q

- Do you believe in 2005 that there are still rules that women consciously or unconsciously adhere to?
- If you were writing a book on etiquette for today's young women what would be the top five most important things?



HAWORTH AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE BRONTËS' WORLD.

- Haworth, 800 feet high in the Pennines, was a crowded industrial township during the Brontë period.
- The population increased by 118 percent between 1801 and 1851 to 3,365. There were no sewers and the water supply was both polluted and inadequate, contributing to a high mortality rate.
- There were 1,344 burials in the church yard between 1840 and 1850 and the average age at death was 25 years; 41 percent of babies died before reaching their sixth birthday. Against the mortality figures the Brontë's deaths, though tragic, were unremarkable.
- Subsistence farming of a few acres, often 'take-in' from the moors was combined with hand-loom weaving or wool combing. This domestic system of worsted manufacture was changing to factory production with water powered machinery.
- The mills built from 1790 along the River Worth were well established when the Brontë family arrived.
- Other occupations included quarrying, building and crafts but there were scarcely any professional people.
- Baptist and Wesleyan chapels flourished and together with the church, provided the village with a focus for social life.

The moors were not as isolated as they are today when the Brontë sisters were alive, as many farmers eked out a living from subsistence farming. All of the sisters' novels describe the windswept moors and the harsh weather either through their characters emotional states or in actuality. Charlotte in many of her letters wrote of the weather and the moors around Haworth:

'When I go out there alone everything reminds me of the times when others were with me, and then the moors seem a wilderness, featureless, solitary, saddening. My sister Emily had a particular love for them, and there is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of her. The distant prospects were Anne's delight, and when I look round she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizon. In the hill-country silence their poetry comes by lines and stanzas into my mind: once I loved it; now I dare not read it...'



Brontë Parsonage

'The average age at death was 25 years; 41 percent of babies died before reaching their sixth birthday.'

Q

- **How have the set and costumes reflected the world outside of the parsonage?**



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE WORLD SURROUNDING THE BRONTËS?

A selective look at some key events.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1816 Elgin Marbles are bought for the British Museum London.
Charlotte Brontë born.</p> <p>1817 Jane Austen dies.
Riots in Derbyshire against low wages.
Branwell Brontë born.</p> <p>1818 Silent Night - the carol written by Huber.
Emily Brontë Born.</p> <p>1819 Queen (to be) Victoria is born.</p> <p>1820 George the Third dies succeeded by his son the Prince Regent - George the Fourth.
Anne Brontë born.</p> <p>1821 Constable paints The Haywain.</p> <p>1824 Lord Byron dies.</p> <p>1825 Samuel Pepys diaries published (1633-1703).</p> <p>1828 Duke of Wellington becomes Prime Minister.</p> <p>1829 First Oxford Cambridge boat race.

Suttee - the Indian custom of immolating a widow along with her dead husband abolished in British India.
Catholic Emancipation Act allows Catholics to sit in parliament and hold any public office.</p> <p>1830 William the Fourth becomes King of England.
Charles Darwin sails as a naturalist on a surveying expedition in HMS Beagle to South America, New Zealand and Australia.
London Bridge Opened.</p> <p>1832 Great Reform Act - number of voters increased from 500,000 to 1,000,000.
Tennyson writes The Lady of Shallot.</p> <p>1834 Poor Law Amendment Act decrees that no able bodied man shall receive assistance unless he enters a workhouse.</p> <p>1835 Hans Christian Anderson publishes the first four of his 168 tales for children.</p> | <p>1837 Victoria becomes Queen.</p> <p>1839 Edgar Allan Poe wrote Fall of the House of Usher.</p> <p>1840 Kew Botanical Gardens opened.</p> <p>1841 First University degree granted to women in the USA.</p> <p>1842 Grace Darling saves 9 people from a shipwreck from her home in a lighthouse.</p> <p>1843 William Wordsworth appointed Poet Laureate</p> <p>1845 Turners painting <i>Rain Steam and Speed</i> exhibited at the Tate Gallery London.</p> <p>1846 Famine in Ireland due to the failure of the potato crop.
Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell published at the sisters' expense.</p> <p>1847 Emily Brontë writes Wuthering Heights, Charlotte Brontë writes Jane Eyre, Anne writes Agnes Grey.</p> <p>1848 First settlers arrive in New Zealand.
Gold discovered in California which leads to the first gold rush.
Anne writes The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Branwell and Emily die.</p> <p>1849 Anne dies.</p> <p>1851 First Double Decker bus introduced.</p> <p>1852 Charles Dickens writes Bleak House.
Charlotte Brontë writes Villette.
Queen Victoria allows chloroform to be administered to her during the birth of her seventh child, thus ensuring its place as an anaesthetic in Britain.</p> <p>1854 Charlotte dies.</p> <p>1861 Patrick Brontë dies.</p> |
|---|---|

THREE SISTERS

By Polly Teale

Cooled up in a parsonage, the Brontës lived out their passions through their fiction. Can these febrile inner worlds ever be captured in theatre? Polly Teale explains why she keeps being drawn back to their tragic story

In 1837, the poet Robert Southey wrote to the young Charlotte Brontë who had confided in him her literary ambitions:

'...the daydreams in which you indulge are likely to produce a distempered state of mind...Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties the less time she will have for it, even as a recreation.'

Charlotte replied:

'Sir, I cannot rest until I have answered your letter. I felt only shame and regret that I had ventured to trouble you...a painful heat rose to my face when I thought of the quires of paper I had covered with what once gave me so much delight but which was now only a source of confusion...I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print. If the wish should arise I'll look to Southey's letter and suppress it.'

There is no evidence that she wrote anything for the next two years.

Today it is difficult for us to imagine a world where women were not allowed to enter a library, where women had to publish under men's names, where women had no part in public life. And yet 150 years is not so long ago. Their struggles are not so distant. We are fascinated by the Brontës because they broke the mould (against all odds). They broke it and

yet they were made by it. They were every inch the product of their time, even in their attempts to free themselves. *Jane Eyre* is believed to be the second-most read book in the English language (after the Bible). *Wuthering Heights* remains one of the great literary creations of all time and is still a bestseller. So why, 150 years later, are we still so drawn to these stories, these characters?

Ten years ago, I adapted *Jane Eyre* for Shared Experience, the theatre company I run with Nancy Meckler. We are interested in theatre's potential to make visible what is hidden, to give form to the world of imagination, emotion and memory, to go beyond the surface of everyday life. This is what literature can do so powerfully: when we read a good novel we are allowed to enter the consciousness of the characters, to know their most intimate fears and longings, seeing the world as if through their eyes. *Jane Eyre* is exactly such a creation. Everything in the novel is seen through the magnifying glass of Jane's psyche. But if this is a psychological drama with Jane at its centre, why did Brontë invent a mad woman, Bertha, Rochester's first wife, locked in an attic to torment her heroine? Why is this rational young woman haunted by a raving, vengeful she-devil? I (along with many others, including the artist Paula Rego who has painted a whole series of work inspired by *Jane Eyre*) was intrigued by the mythic power of the mad woman, by Charlotte Brontë's repulsion and attraction to her creation, by the mad woman's danger and eroticism, her terrifying rage. I wanted to explore what she represented, how she came into existence, to understand how the mad woman had been born in reaction to the Victorian ideal of femininity, how she had grown out of the Victorian consciousness.



BRONTË

by Polly Teale



Later, I went on to write a play about Jean Rhys, whose novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, imagining the mad woman's life before she was locked away, giving the first Mrs Rochester her own story. Here the mad woman is no longer a monster. We discover her as a child, follow her journey, her growing alienation, knowing where it will end. *Wide Sargasso Sea* became a modern classic. The mad woman was out of her attic, back on the run, ready to stray into our fiction in whatever form she might choose, a symbol of female power and psychosis.

My third and final play on this subject is a return to the source, to the beginning: the Brontës themselves. How was it possible that these women, three celibate Victorian sisters, living in isolation on the Yorkshire moors, could have written some of the most passionate (even erotic) fiction of all time? Perhaps the simplest answer lies in their father (their mother died when they were children). Self-educated, from illiterate Irish peasant stock, he went on to Cambridge and later published books of his own poems and sermons. He was a passionate believer in the transformative power of literature and art. He educated his daughters and encouraged them to read whatever they could lay their hands on (most women at the time would have had carefully supervised reading). The Brontës read Byron, Shakespeare, George Sand, Milton and Shelley. From childhood they wrote books (on tiny pages made out of old flour and sugar bags), not knowing this was out of the ordinary, not yet knowing what was and wasn't allowed. But soon the sisters faced harsh reality. Highly educated, intelligent, full of curiosity and hunger for life, they entered a world with little or no place for them. As poor, plain women their life prospects were severely limited. Becoming a governess was virtually the only profession available to them. The sisters' attempts to work as governesses were lonely and short-lived. Anne was the only one who managed to hold down a job for more than a few months. It was never long before they returned home.

Their responses to their predicament were complex and individual: Emily refused to wear a corset or petticoats and withdrew from society, spending much of her time alone on the moors; Charlotte was hugely ambitious, longing for fame and recognition; Anne, the youngest, developed a strong social perspective, writing to expose injustice and bring about reform. Emily and Charlotte's reactions to their isolation could not have been more different. It took Charlotte months to persuade Emily to consider publishing her work; for Emily writing was a deeply private act, her invisibility a cloak that allowed her to live as a recluse, in communion with nature, untouched by social constraints or expectations. She never forgave Charlotte for

betraying her real identity to her publisher by letting slip that the author was in fact a woman.

Meanwhile, their brother Branwell, floundering under the weight of the family's impossibly high expectations, returned home heavily in debt, an alcoholic and a drug addict. The Brontës were once again living under the same roof, back in the intimate proximity of childhood. It was through Branwell that the sisters experienced the horror of mental illness as he descended into paranoia, bringing chaos to the household. It was also Branwell who provided the source of their sexual knowledge: caught up in a series of affairs, he allowed the sisters to vicariously share in his adventures.

All three sisters used their brother as a model for their fictional characters. He appears in various guises in their work according to their relationship with him. Charlotte, who was closest to Branwell as a child, later became the most estranged. Her outrage at his degenerate behaviour was in part a way of dealing with her own bitter frustrations. Lonely and unloved, she was forced to look on as her brother satisfied his appetites.

Here we return to the mad woman, perhaps the most sexual of all the Brontë creations, and the question of where she came from, what she represented. She is both a hideous monster and an exotic temptress, raised to enchant, to seduce. Rochester's description of her when they first met in the West Indies is irresistible. She is Charlotte's fantasy of herself, beautiful and desired. She comes from the land of the Brontë's imagination, from a land of hot rain and hurricanes. She is both dangerous and exciting. She is passionate and sexual, angry and violent. She is the embodiment of everything that Charlotte feared in herself and longed to express, of everything Charlotte's life could never be.

'I can hardly tell you how life gets on here at Howorth. There is not an event whatever to mark its progress. One day resembles another and all have lifeless physiognomies. Sunday, baking day, and Saturday are the only ones that bear the slightest distinctive mark. Meantime, time wears away. I shall soon be 30 and I have done nothing yet...I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel, to work, to live a life of action.'

Although Charlotte would never 'live a life of action' in the external, physical sense, she would travel the world in her imagination. The external lives of the Brontë sisters were dreary, repetitive, uneventful, and yet their inner lives were the opposite. To tell this story we need to dramatise the collision between drab domesticity and unfettered, soaring imagination, to see both the real and internal world at once, to make visible what is hidden inside. That is why in our play the characters from the novels are living in the house, haunting their creators. While the sisters cook and clean and sew there exists another world full of passion and fury. It seems to me that the theatre is the right place to tell this particular tale. After all, this is a story of make-believe, of the power of the imagination to transcend time and place and circumstance, to take us to places we cannot otherwise go.

***'I shall soon be thirty
and I have done
nothing yet... I feel as
if we were all buried
here. I long to travel,
to work, to live a life
of action'***

GOVERNESSES

Both Charlotte and Anne worked as governesses and found the work and domestic situation in their new positions to be very stressful and physically draining. In their novels they wrote about their primarily unhappy experiences. In the play, Charlotte strongly reminds Emily that:

'It was not my choice to go away. I didn't choose to spend my every moment with a spoilt girl and a miserable baby. To be ordered about 'til I was dead on my feet day after day. I did it for you. That you might be here and not parted from what you must have.'

Until they were old enough to go away to a boarding school or college, or have a (male) tutor, upper and middle-class children were taught in their homes by governesses. Whilst many governesses relied heavily on rote question and answer books such as *Mangnall's Questions*, the most popular book at the time, there were those who were well-educated. In *Thackeray's Vanity Fair*, Miss Pinkerton claims her girls to be

'qualified to instruct in Greek; Latin; and the rudiments of Hebrew; mathematics and history; in Spanish, French, Italian, and geography; in music, vocal and instrumental; in dancing without the aid of a master; and in the elements of natural sciences.'

Although a governess had to have the education and manners of a 'lady', she was treated as a servant. However, the other servants did not accept her, either because she was infinitely better educated or she shared a level of intimacy with the master's children. The life of a governess was a life of isolation. Even so, it was almost the only option for an unmarried middle-class woman who needed to earn her own living.

'I am afraid I am about the worst person in the world to advise you; I really have no notion what you could do unless, indeed, you turn governess - that is what young ladies in novels mostly do, I believe.'

Chrystabel by Emma Jane Worboise. Chapter 30.

'Salaries were very low, especially when contrasted with those of a male tutor. He could earn around £84 a year for as little as an hour a day teaching from his own rooms. A live in, permanently on duty governess would only earn less than half of that amount.'

Following the industrial revolution, the new middle classes were created, and with them came a great surge of wealth to the country. Suburbs began to grow, ideal for the factory owner for example who no longer wanted to 'live above the shop'. It was also the start of gentility. Before the industrial revolution women could earn money as secretaries, book-keepers, shop-keepers, hairdressers, midwives and pharmacists, but the change in society decreed that it was not 'genteel' for women to work. The only option as a woman if you needed to earn money was in a factory as a servant or a governess, that is if you wanted a legal profession.

To earn a living you had a few other minimal choices. One could:

- Mother a dead relative's children.
- Make collars and lampshades at home and sell them privately for a pittance.
- Write - if simply signed 'by a lady' and thus protecting your dignity. It was not considered respectable to be a female published author.
- Become a visiting or daily governess, which was paid less than a live-in governess and considered less genteel.
- Teach in your home. Again the Brontë sisters tried this but they had no replies.

Work undertaken solely for economic reasons was unlikely to be fulfilling or pleasurable: the concept of 'job satisfaction' is a modern one.

Many governesses were forced into the profession on the death of their father, there were no pensions and life insurance and often the fathers would die without having made a good enough provision for their remaining family. Indeed the daughter of the Governor of the Bank of England became a governess for this reason.

Salaries were very low, especially when contrasted with those of a male tutor. He could earn around £84 a year for as little as an hour a day teaching from his own rooms. A live-in, permanently on-duty governess would earn less than half that amount. Charlotte in 1841 earned £20 a year, less £4 deducted for laundry expenses! Also many governesses supported other relatives, and in 1850 a survey showed that out of 75 governesses 47 were supporting relatives.

It was also very hard to get a job - demand for governesses was easily outstripped by supply. Upper-class households mainly chose their governesses by recommendation only, the middle classes advertised, often using the clergy as an unofficial employment agency. It was considered shameful and vulgar self-promotion to advertise in newspapers and periodicals, so many women were forced to offer their services simply in exchange for a roof over their head. The interview usually took place through letters only, so both parties were never sure what to expect when the governess arrived at her post.

Life was hard for the governess, one did not have a respected 'place' in the household, being neither servant nor gentry, and therefore the governess was snubbed by both groups. Mothers would often only visit their children for an hour a day and they had little clue as to how their children behaved.

Excerpt from Brontë

TWO MONTHS LATER ANNE ARRIVES HOME FROM HER FIRST PERIOD IN SERVICE AS A GOVERNESS. EMILY AND CHARLOTTE HELP HER OFF WITH HER COAT AND GLOVES. SHE SNEEZES.

ANNE: *They talk of nothing but the day they will marry and wish only to learn what will win them a wealthy husband. They are both pretty as little kittens. They pity me I am certain. How, they wonder, would life be bearable with a plain face and a dreary dress. One night they took it upon themselves to dress me up and would not be persuaded against it. They thought it, I suppose, their duty to convince me that I might make more of myself given a little effort. The ordeal took an entire evening. I was prodded and pinched and made to put on every dress in their possession, jewels and all. It was clear however that in spite of their enthusiasm nothing suited. I was not improved one bit by their lavish attentions. When I said as much they became sulky and rude and blamed me for looking miserable. The next day I was given notice.*

In *Agnes Grey*, Anne draws on her own experiences of being a governess, describing the isolation, the frustration, the insensitive and sometimes cruel treatment to her on behalf of the employers and their families.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in Chapter 3 Agnes describes her violent attempts to subdue the six year old Mary Ann Bloomfield:

'Sometimes, exasperated to the utmost pitch, I would shake her violently by the shoulders, or pull her long hair, or put her in the corner, - for which she punished me with loud, shrill, piercing screams that went through my head like a knife. She knew I hated this, and when she had shrieked her utmost, would look into my face with an air of vindictive satisfaction, explaining - 'Now then! That's for you!'

One reviewer of *Agnes Grey*, in Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper wrote in 1848:

'We do not actually assert that the author must have been a governess himself, to describe as he does the minute torments and incessant tediums of her life, but he must have bribed some governess very largely, either with love or money, to reveal to him the secrets of her prison house, or, he must have devoted extraordinary powers of observation and discovery to the elucidation of the subject'

The children were very quick to exploit governess' powerlessness. Governess baiting was a popular sport and examples written about at the time either in novels or histories include:

- Putting live crayfish in her bed
- Putting mice in her tea caddy
- Putting squirrels or hedgehogs in her bedroom
- And showing governesses up in respect of her birthright or knowledge.

A typical day might be:

- Piano practice
- Breakfast
- Copy books
- Arithmetic
- History
- Break
- Geography
- Poems
- Dinner (lunch)
- Rest – using a blackboard for posture
- Bible reading and reading aloud from a novel
- Walk
- Tea
- Sewing/reading aloud.

Careers were also short-lived, the ideal age for a governess was 25 and by 35 she was often considered too old. The only real escape was marriage, but who to marry? The only men they might meet of a similar standing were curates and teachers. And even if one was able to get married, because of disease and high death rates, many were forced to return to being a governess.

In 1843 the Governesses Benevolent Institution was founded for the placement and protection of governesses. In 1848 the Institution opened Queen's College in London for girls over the age of 12. Queens' curriculum was its major achievement. Girls could choose from lectures or classes in modern languages, mechanics, geography, geology, English grammar, English literature, Latin, botany, chemistry, philosophy, and political economy.

With Bedford College, founded in 1849, Queen's showed new possibilities for girls. It helped initiate an educational campaign as a gateway to other rights and opportunities. By the end of the decade, classes were being arranged for women at University College in London.

'Careers were also short-lived, the ideal age for a governess was 25 and by 35 she was often considered too old.'



ARCHETYPES OF THE IDEAL WOMAN AND THE IDEAL MAN IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

On Wednesday of the first week of rehearsal, Polly Teale (Writer and Director) and Leah Hausman (Movement Director) led a session together on what an ideal man or woman would be like during the early 1800's.

Polly asked the actors to call out words or qualities that the 'perfect woman' should embody:

- Maternal
- Submissive
- Gentle
- Meek
- Pious/Christian
- Chaste
- Temperate
- Resourceful
- Modest
- Musical
- Decorative
- Petite –but not thin!
- Soft
- Pale
- Small feet and hands
- Quiet
- Supportive
- Caring
- Devoted

They did the same for the 'perfect man':

- Strong
- Handsome
- Upright
- Successful
- Unemotional
- Steadfast
- Honourable
- Reliable
- Valiant
- Courageous
- Courteous
- Protective
- Worldly
- A good Provider
- Wise
- Learned
- Healthy
- Wealthy
- A Sportsman
- Physically Capable
- Sober

Q

- What other qualities/attributes would you add?



BRONTË

by Polly Teale

Polly then chose 2 words, one from each list and asked the actors to create a tableau whilst thinking of these words. She chose 'devoted' and 'supportive' from the female list and 'protective' and 'courageous' from the male list. They tried different tableaux or frozen pictures with different words, Polly then allowed the pictures to breathe through a count of five. On the first count the tableau would begin slowly changing until it reached a different tableau by the last count.

EXERCISE:

Choose your own words from your list and try creating different tableaux. Obviously the differences between how we behave today to how men and women behaved in the early 19th century is very pronounced, what physical changes do you notice in your bodies as you try out different tableaux?

Polly asked the actors to be more aware of certain parts of their bodies during different tableaux, she called out 'neck' or 'wrists' and the tableaux changed. For the next step, Polly asked the actors to play their characters in a non verbal scene. She asked the girls to prepare 'tea' for their father and a male suitor. During this scene, Polly asked the actors several questions such as: 'what is your best feature and how can you present it to the best advantage, but also modestly?' and 'how does the suitor make you feel?' and 'You are in competition with your sisters. How can you get his attention?'

EXERCISE:

Remembering your list of attributes for the ideal man and woman, create a short non verbal scene – perhaps having tea or a meal or playing cards...Set the women in your scene an objective that they want to get married. How difficult is it flirt modestly or get noticed? What are the best tactics for a woman to achieve that objective in the early 19th century?

BRONTË'S EYRES

This is an article by Polly Teale on her experience and feelings about Paula Rego. Paula Rego's paintings of *Jane Eyre* characters feature very strongly on the *Brontë* set, and the rehearsal room had copies of her books and paintings photocopied and blown up on the walls for inspiration:

Paula Rego's studio is hidden behind a small, shabby door in a dingy back passage moments away from the roaring London traffic. There is no number on the door and it takes a few minutes, and a few inquiries, to discover that this is (according to the workmen next door) the entrance to Paula's studio. I knock doubtfully and wait. Suddenly, the door opens and Paula appears. Like a door in a fairy story, it takes you out of one world and into another. For a moment, I think that the room is full of people, that Paula is not alone, and then I realise that the vast studio is peopled by her paintings and extraordinary props.



Paula Rego's *In the Comfort of the Bonnet*

'Out of the darkness of charcoal and ink and paint, the creatures of Brontë's imagination came crowding.'

The studio - half playroom, half theatre - is alive with possibility. There is a sea of dressing-up clothes and ancient children's toys: a stuffed dog, a huge plastic horse, and two giant papier mache rabbits, one carrying the other in its arms. Then there are the pictures. All around me are images that have sprung to life from the pages of *Jane Eyre*.

Paula and I met for the first time at the opening night of my play *After Mrs Rochester*. I had written to her explaining that she had been a huge influence on my work. That I had returned again and again over the years to her pictures for inspiration. My play, as its title suggests, is about the mad woman from *Jane Eyre* and her legacy. It was not until the play was nearly written that I read in a newspaper article that Paula's latest paintings were inspired by *Jane Eyre*.

So there I stood in Paula's studio, looking about me at Brontë's world brought to life, extraordinary and terrifying. Out of the darkness of charcoal and ink and paint, the creatures of Brontë's imagination came crowding. There is Lowood, the school where Jane is a pupil. We see her, a tiny figure, face to the wall, hidden behind a gigantic man. We can sense that some terrible act is about to happen. The room is full of girls and women, watching, nervous, straining to see but afraid of being seen. There is an atmosphere of palpable fear, of violence. This is the school where young women are shorn of their curls. The school that promised to 'mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh'. Where female sexuality is a crime. The sense of the danger of being seen, of being visible, runs through the pictures. There is an astonishing painting of Jane looking out from behind a red curtain, both cautious and curious. Hungry for life but afraid of

stepping out into the light and risking humiliation. But we know, we sense, that Jane will step out. It is this courage to enter the world, a place where women are at best a decoration, at worst invisible, that characterises Jane and makes her one of English literature's greatest heroines. Proud, prickly and fiercely independent, Jane personifies Brontë's own struggle. The longing to be known, to be seen, struggles against the crushing fear of rejection.

In the next painting, we see Rochester in the centre of the room, in front of the same red curtain. He, unlike Jane, stares straight ahead, as if in provocation, daring us to come forward (is it Jane he is looking at?). Magnificent but haunted, challenging but wounded, Paula captures the sadness at the heart of Rochester. He, like Jane, longs to be loved but fears rejection. Both fear that they are ugly, both fear that they are unlovable. The power of the story is that we watch these two difficult, proud people fall in love in spite of their resistance.

In another extraordinary image, we see Jane alone against a violent red sunset. Her hands clutch between her legs through the thick folds of her skirt. She strains with longing towards an absent Rochester. In this and the curtain painting, Jane stands alone, physically powerful, potent, desirous. In other paintings, Paula has depicted Jane with others. Here she is always tiny (as Brontë describes her), like a child, scarcely grown into a woman, hiding behind furniture, her face buried in the pages of a book. This sense of Jane, one minute huge, strong, the next tiny, fragile, is exactly as Rochester sees her:

'Never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable. A mere reed she feels in my hand. I could bend her with my fingers and thumb: what good would it do if I bent, if I upore, if I crushed her? Consider that eye. Consider the resolute, wild free thing looking out of it, defying me. Whatever I do with its cage I cannot get at it. The savage beautiful creature.'

(I am struck now by how this last description might well apply to Paula herself.)

Finally, I must describe the picture of Bertha's monkey, the saddest of all the images. (I saw the original toy monkey in Paula's studio - an ancient, dog-eared, threadbare creature with button eyes and missing hands.) In the painting, the monkey has been dressed in a straitjacket and placed alone at the top of a ladder, like Bertha in her attic. The haunting sadness of this strange animal is hard to describe. The sense of Bertha's abandonment and alienation is realised in this curious toy. And that is Paula's great gift - to make visible the hidden - to allow us to see or sense what is hidden inside.



Paula Rego's *Night*

Q

- What do you feel about the paintings featured in the set of *Brontë*?

AN INTERVIEW WITH DESIGNER ANGELA DAVIES

What research did you do before designing this play?

I took a trip to Howarth. The atmosphere of the house and setting including the Crows was very inspiring, a bleak austere place. I was able to touch their personal belongings, gloves, look at fabrics they used. It all helped to get to know their characters, to get closer to them.

What were the major challenges?

Design-wise, working out how realistic/naturalistic to be or not to be. In the text the actors step into character within the play, I did not want the set to answer questions or leap ahead. It needed to be a modern rehearsal type space and also their house we have a flexible space that can be both.

How did the idea of using Paula Rego paintings come about?

Polly, the Director, has been inspired by Paula's Jane Eyre images and she brought the idea of using these on stage to me. Luckily I have also been a fan of Paula Rego's work. I think the nature of her dark etchings created the right atmosphere for the piece. We use them on stage as they would be used in the rehearsal space as an inspiration for the play taking place in front of them.

What is your favourite scene? Why?

Branwell's return from London, because of the tension of expectation and disappointment and the explosive atmosphere it creates in a small house.

The costumes are a combination of modern and Victorian, why?

The actors stepping into their characters is very much part of the play. Getting into costume on stage from modern rehearsal clothes into Victorian dresses helps to illustrate what it was like to be a woman at that time. The restraint of their corsets = the restraints on the way they live.

Do you have any advice for students who would like a career in stage design?

As for schooling/training, choose a good course that will both let you explore your ideas imaginatively and provide you with competent technical skills to realise your ideas, one which also allows you to develop good communicating/collaborating techniques.

Get to know your text very well, always respond in an instinctive, honest way. Be prepared to be a bit of a chameleon, as each play/director/company will require a different approach.

Q

- **What was your favourite aspect of the design?**
- **If you were designing this production and could choose the venue/theatre/space what would you choose and how would your design differ from Angela's?**

Q

THE STAGE LOOKS LIKE A REHEARSAL ROOM TOWARDS THE END OF REHEARSALS. OBJECTS FROM THE WORLD OF THE PLAY STORED UP AROUND THE ROOM ALONG WITH VARIOUS PIECES OF VICTORIAN FURNITURE. EVERYWHERE THERE ARE BOOKS. SOME OLD. SOME MODERN BOOKS ABOUT THE BRONTES. THE ROOMS OF THE BRONTE PARSONAGE ARE MARKED OUT ON THE FLOOR WITH GAFFA TAPE.

THE ACTORS PLAYING THE THREE SISTERS ARE ALREADY IN THE SPACE CHANGING OUT OF MODERN CLOTHES AND INTO REHEARSAL COSTUMES.

- **These are the opening stage instructions to the play. What impact does it have, having the actors in modern dress and the Parsonage obviously being a stage/rehearsal space?**

AN INTERVIEW WITH COMPOSER PETER SALEM

What research did you do before starting composing for this play?

I read *Wuthering Heights* for the first time to get a sense of the dark, bleak but exhilarating wildness of the moors. It's a great source for getting a picture of the Brontës' location and for suggesting a 'soundworld' for the play.

What instruments are you using and why?

Apart from electronic sounds and the sounds of flapping wings, bird calls, the wind etc, the principal instruments will be a high 'ethnic' wooden flute (representing the freedom experienced through imagination, through writing – esp. in the case of Emily) and piano (representing the outside world and ambition in relation to Charlotte and Branwell).

What are the chief differences to the Cathy and Bertha themes...?

Bertha's is very dark and physical, Cathy's is more to do with her mental state and her longing for her past freedom (this will connect with the flute motif related to Emily).

What is your favourite scene?

Too many to mention! And quite a bit I haven't seen yet. Emily's death is very moving....

Any major challenges for you?

Yes! One is trying to get a distinct sound for the novels, when they appear, to help with clarity. The structure of the play is very complex, frequently moving across time and in and out of novels

What are the main differences between working with Shared Experience and other theatre companies?

The difference between SET and other companies is the physical content, coming away from the text to express something purely physically or counterpointing sections of text with physical work. This is always particularly interesting from the point of view of sound as these are heightened non-naturalistic moments which can use sound very effectively.

Q

- **When in your opinion was the most effective use of music, sound or song in the production?**
- **Why?**

THE FAMILY

Patrick Brontë was born in Ireland, County Down on 17th March 1777, and the first of ten children. He describes his early achievements to Mrs Gaskell when she was researching her book, *'The Life of Charlotte Brontë'*:

'I shew'd an early fondness for books, and continued at school for several years. At the age of sixteen, knowing that my Father could afford me no pecuniary aid I began to think of doing something for myself – I therefore opened a public school – and in this line, I continued five or six years: I was then a tutor in a Gentleman's Family – from which situation I removed to Cambridge, and enter'd St John's College...'

(An extract from *The Brontës* by Juliet Barker)

On graduating Patrick began a career in the church. His first position was as a curate in Essex on £60 a year. Several years later Patrick moved up to Dewsbury, Yorkshire, to begin a new position as curate and it was here that he met Maria Branwell, the niece of a friend of his and his future wife to be. They were married on the 29th December 1812.

In 1820 Patrick Brontë was appointed as incumbent of Haworth, and arrived in the township with his Cornish-born wife, Maria, and their six children.

During his curacies and as vicar of Haworth, Patrick was a successfully published poet and author.

But by 1821, Maria was taken seriously ill, probably with cancer of the uterus. Patrick was distraught and describes one particularly low day as: 'a gloomy day, a day of clouds and darkness'.

Mrs. Gaskell in her book on Charlotte included sensational stories and gossip about Patrick's abilities as a father. She wrote that he denied them meat, colourful clothes and generally painted a picture of a half mad recluse who wanted nothing to do with his children.

This sensationalism has lately been seen as an attempt to explain away those characteristics of Charlottes' writings that were considered unacceptable by the Victorians.

The children grew up surrounded by their father's published books and newspapers and reviews of novels. Branwell and their father would also take books out of the library for the girls, as no women were permitted in a public library at this time!



EXERCISE:

Read the short extract below; discuss with your group what experiences Branwell had in London. Why did he not go to the Royal Academy as he had planned? Was his purse really stolen? How does Emily feel?

- Emily: You went to the academy...but they would not see you?
- Branwell: BARKS AT HER. I told you. I could not go. My purse was taken and...
- Emily: You bought yourself a new –MEANING THE CRAVATE.
- Branwell: You must tell Father...and the others. Tell them I am gone to bed and will not be disturbed. Tell them I am much shaken and do not wish to talk of it. Do you understand? I will not be interrogated by my sisters who have themselves no idea what it takes to leave home and make their way.

EMILY STARES BACK AT HIM AS HE TURNS AND LEAVES THE ROOM. HE GOES TO HIS BEDROOM AND WRITES IN HIS DIARY.

- Branwell: He threaded through the dense and bustling crowds and walked for hours never staying to eat or drink. His mind was too restless to stop and fully examine anything. He was searching for scenes connected to glorious events and persons. Looking on where the great, the brave had been before him. But he felt only the want in himself. That restless, knowing, uneasy feeling that he himself was nothing.

Q

Consider what might happen after this scene in your production. Perhaps Branwell comes down later for supper, or the sisters quiz Emily, or next morning at breakfast for example. Create a short scene. How does everyone in the scene feel? Experiment with showing and hiding the emotions. Use a scale of 1-10. Ten is showing physically everything that you feel. One is still feeling your emotion but hiding it very well. Play around with changing the numbers during the scene. It is advisable to keep your scene very simple as you want to concentrate on the emotions generated and the reactions to these rather than remembering lines.

- **What effect do you think the Brontë children's upbringing had on their success or lack of success?**
- **Branwell, although the only son was not the only child to go into the world and try to make a living. What do you think pushed him onto a path of adultery, drink and possible fraud?**
- **In this production how do the characters change throughout the play?**

AN EXTRACT FROM *THE PRINCESS* BY TENNYSON

'Man is the hunter: women is his game
Man for the field and women for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and women with the heart:
Man to command and women to obey:
All else confusion.'

EXERCISE:

Re-write the poem for 2005. Use the same poetic format. For example:

Man is the.....women is.....

Do this for all five lines.

What would you change 'All else confusion' for?

Q

- Now nearly 200 years on, is this an archaic view of male and female roles in our society?
- What prejudices surrounding women do we still face in 2005?
- Consider your own opinions on marriage, having a family, working when a woman has children, sex and socialising.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE NOVELS MENTIONED IN THE PLAY

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

The tenant of the title is Helen Huntingdon, who, under the name Mrs Graham, arrives at the decaying Elizabethan mansion and causes gossip and rumour to spread in the neighbourhood. She arouses the interest of Gilbert Markham, a local farmer, and though she tries to repel his growing love for her, his closeness to her young son eventually makes her treat him in a more friendly fashion. The relationship however is hindered by the opposition and ridicule of his family, and by the figure of Frederick Lawrence, who seems to have an interest in or influence over the mysterious tenant which arouses Gilbert's antagonism. After the pair fight, 'Mrs Graham' thrusts into Gilbert's hands a diary which tells the story of her disastrous marriage.

A serious and pious young girl, she has become fascinated by a young man of bad reputation, Arthur Huntingdon, a Byronic figure of great fascination but also of hardly-concealed moral failings. She marries him, fatally confident that her love will reform him. For a time all goes well, but gradually he resumes his drinking and womanising, and Helen becomes increasingly unhappy. A son is born, but her husband's debaucheries become more frequent and more organised. When he begins to corrupt his son into his own 'manly' habits she decides to flee, and after an aborted attempt, sadistically thwarted by her husband, she finally achieves her aim, fleeing to Wildfell Hall, in the vicinity of her brother, who is Frederick Lawrence.

When Arthur is on his death-bed, Helen returns to him and watches helplessly as he dies unrepentant. After some delays and misunderstandings she marries Gilbert Markham.

Jane Eyre

Charlotte's most famous novel depicts the emotional and spiritual development of the heroine, which is mirrored by her physical journeyings throughout the book. It describes her search for self-worth, for identity as an individual and for economic independence, in a world which did not expect such ambitions in women.

Jane first appears as an orphaned child, lodged with an aunt who resents her and shamelessly favours her own children. She is sent away to a charity school run by Mr Brocklehurst, where, through the harsh regime, she learns survival and eventually succeeds in becoming a teacher there herself. She advertises for a post as governess, and is appointed to care for Adele, the ward of the sardonic Edward Rochester at Thornfield Hall. Thus far, Charlotte is drawing heavily on her own and her sisters' lives, but it is not an autobiographical novel. The aunt who brought Charlotte up was a benevolent influence. By contrast, her experiences, and those of her sisters, as governesses were far bleaker than that portrayed here. And there was never any Rochester to fall in love with her.

What attracts Rochester to Jane is not her looks (she is small and plain, like her author) but the honesty with which she speaks her mind, and her practical common sense, which enables her to save his life. He proposes marriage, but she discovers at the altar that he already has a wife, Bertha, a lunatic who is kept in the attic at Thornfield. Jane refuses to become Rochester's mistress, and flees from him. Destitute, she is taken in by the Rivers family, who, coincidentally, turn out to be cousins, and reveal that she is heiress to sufficient funds to give her financial security for life. The Revd. St. John Rivers, who is planning to go to India as a missionary, asks her to marry him and follow him in his calling. Jane is on the point of acceptance, when she hears a supernatural cry from Rochester. She returns to Thornfield to find that the house has been burned down by Bertha, and that Rochester himself has been maimed and blinded in an unsuccessful attempt to save his wife. Now, Jane can marry him, not just because he is widowed but because his physical dependence gives her the equality to which she aspires.

‘Jane first appears as an orphaned child, lodged with an aunt who resents her and shamelessly favours her own children.’



BRONTË

by Polly Teale

‘Heathcliff and Catherine develop a passionate love, while mutual hatred grows between Heathcliff and Hindley.’

Wuthering Heights

The structure of *Wuthering Heights* is complex: the narrator is Lockwood, Heathcliff's shadowy tenant at Thrushcross Grange. He learns the history of the Earnshaws and the Lintons from Ellen ('Nellie') Dean, who has been a servant at both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and whose account fills most of the book. Within that story, the characters come to life and speak with their own individual voices.

Ellen's account begins with the father of Catherine and Hindley Earnshaw returning home with an orphan child, whom he names Heathcliff and who becomes his favourite. Heathcliff and Catherine develop a passionate love, while mutual hatred grows between Heathcliff and Hindley. After Mr Earnshaw's death, Hindley humiliates Heathcliff, who endures everything on account of his love, until he overhears Catherine tell Ellen that it would degrade her to marry him. Catherine has met Edgar and Isabella, the children of the Linton family at Thrushcross Grange, and Edgar has proposed to her. She accepts, and Heathcliff vanishes.

Three years later, Heathcliff returns as abruptly as he left. The petulant adolescent has changed into a master schemer whose twin passions, love and desire for revenge, are thinly masked by wealth and an air of gentility. He lodges with Hindley, who is now widowed with a young son, Hareton. He encourages Hindley's drunkenness and gambling, and wins from him the deeds to Wuthering Heights. He renews his association with Catherine, to the dismay of her effete husband Edgar, but then elopes with Isabella, whom he maltreats. Catherine becomes pregnant, and a sudden irruption by Heathcliff induces her labour: she dies giving birth to Cathy. Isabella escapes to London, where she has a son, giving him her maiden name of Linton.

Step by step, Heathcliff takes control of the younger generation. After Hindley's death, he brutalises Hareton in revenge for his own treatment. Isabella, too, dies, and he seizes their son, Linton, whom Edgar had sought to care for. Finally, he decoys Cathy to Wuthering Heights where he forces her to marry Linton. In this way, he gains control of both houses, and obliterates both family names. Edgar and Linton die in turn. Cathy develops an affection for Hareton, and the possibility emerges of eventual happiness and redemption. The fulfilment of Heathcliff's plan should have been the destruction of them both, but his vindictiveness has worn him out, and his only desire is to be reunited with Catherine beyond the grave. He wastes away, and the novel ends with village gossip of their ghosts being seen together on the moors.



AN INTERVIEW WITH WRITER/DIRECTOR POLLY TEALE

What was it like to write about real people. Does it liberate or restrict?

The first three months of work on the play was all research. At one point I thought my head would explode with all the information, the wonderful detail, the endless dates, the theories of the biographers. I think though, in the end, you have to decide what it is about this story that fascinates you here, now, in the 21st century. The danger of biographical work is that it gets bogged down in event, in detail, in the surface narrative of the life. You have to be pretty brutal and chuck out anything that isn't relevant to your bigger question, your theme. You want to be able to dig down, not just move forward through the story. To do that, you have to make space.

For those who know a lot about the Brontës, they will notice huge omissions and also the occasional liberty! In the end, though, this is a response to the Brontë story, not a piece of biography. That's the reason I begin the piece in modern dress. I didn't want to pretend this was real. I wanted us to look at it through the filter of time, to know that we are playing a kind of game: dressing up, trying to imagine, putting ourselves in their shoes, joining all those before us who have done the same. After all, this is a story of make-believe, of the power of the imagination to transcend time and place, to take us to places we cannot otherwise go.

There are several references to the social changes which are taking place.

It was very important to me to place the Brontës in history, to know that they lived at a time of huge social upheaval. The changes they were witnessing amidst the Industrial Revolution were the beginnings of everything that has come since. The conversations they have about the working conditions at the mill could be about contemporary sweatshops. They were there at the beginning – the sense of emerging capitalism, of the huge possibilities and dangers of mechanisation. It's all there.

Why did you choose to have Cathy and Bertha represented on stage?

Cathy is in the house because Emily is creating *Wuthering Heights*. She is alive in Emily's imagination as she conjures her up to write. Bertha or the madwoman has a different relationship to her creator, Charlotte. She is an expression of everything (sexual longing, rage, frustration) which Charlotte wishes to disown, to conceal from others. She erupts out of Charlotte's unconscious and must be constantly stifled or locked away. In the second half, when Jane comes to life, Charlotte takes on the role of Jane, casting herself as the 'good angel', the moral centre of the story and antithesis of the madwoman. If Jane is an idealised version of Charlotte, then the madwoman is everything that she, the Victorian woman, is not allowed to be.

What about Anne? Why isn't she haunted by one of her fictional creations?

Anne's writing had a much stronger social, political agenda. It was less about her deep unconscious needs, her inner world, and more of a social document; a tool to provoke reform, to expose injustice.

CATHY AND BERTHA

In the introduction to the play, Polly Teale – the Writer and Director describes why Cathy and Bertha work in different ways and why Bertha is less of a conscious creation than Cathy.

Cathy and Bertha appear on stage as they surface in the minds of the creators. Cathy appears much as she is found in *Wuthering Heights*. Emily is writing the section where Cathy is feverish and delirious, close to the end of her life. She has torn open her pillow and is obsessively trying to remember the names of the birds from which the feathers come, in the belief that it will reconnect her to her childhood. To the free, primitive self that exists before self consciousness, before socialisation. The image of Cathy unable to recognize her reflection, unable to recognize her adult self in the mirror is central to both Cathy and Emily's crisis. Their fear of being neutered, being destroyed by conformity.

CATHY: I wish I were a girl again. Half savage and hardy and free. Why am I so changed? I am sure I would be myself again were I once amongst the heather on those hills.

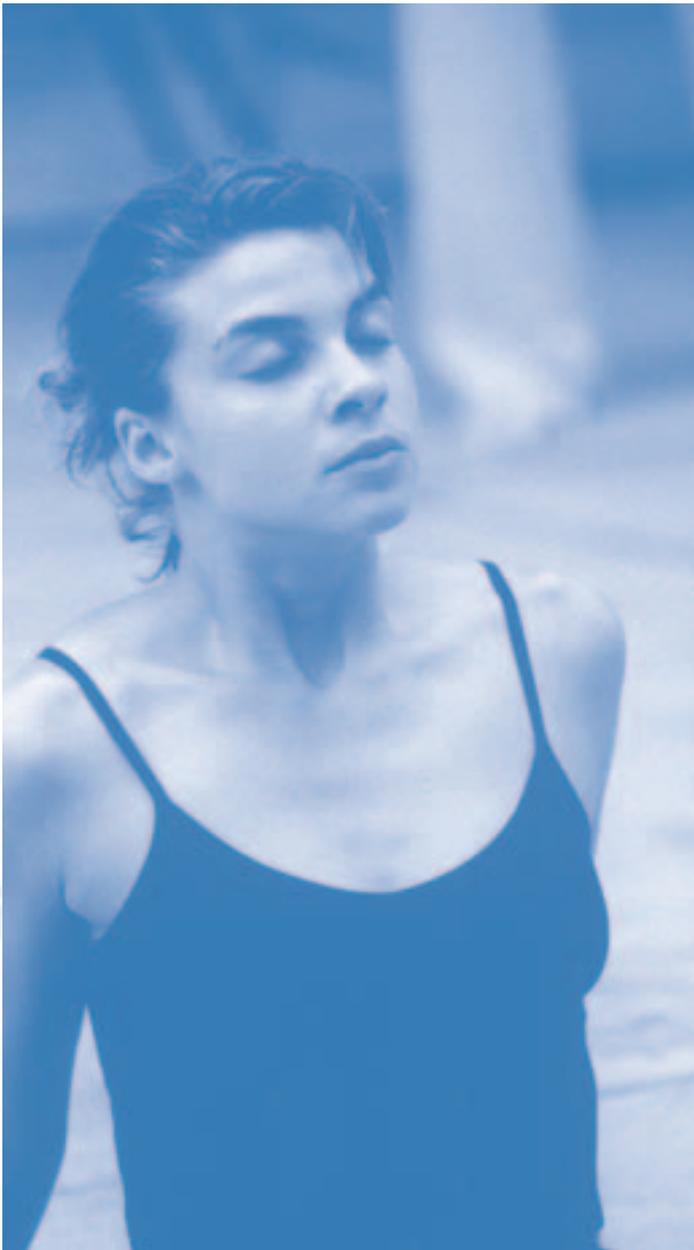
That's a turkey's, and this is a wild duck's, and this is a pigeon's. And this. I should know it amongst a thousand. It's a lapwing's. Beautiful bird. Wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its' nest and it felt the rain coming.

Bertha first surfaces in Charlotte's childhood fantasy of herself as the exquisitely beautiful daughter admired by all. Later Bertha becomes an expression of the part of Charlotte (sexual longing, rage frustration, loneliness) which she wishes to disown, to conceal from others. In the second half of the play, when *Jane Eyre* comes to life, Charlotte takes on the role of Jane, casting herself as 'The Good Angel', the moral centre of the story and antithesis of Bertha.

Bertha: Beat me. Hurt me. Make me. Sorry. I'm so sorry. So bad. So hurting. So much want. So much. Can't...

Q

- In this play we see Cathy, Emily's fictional creation, and Bertha Charlotte's fictional creation, why does Anne not have one of her characters come to life on stage?
- Natalia Tena plays both Cathy and Bertha, in the production, how does she differentiate between the two 'ghosts'? Consider the different energies and physical mannerisms of the two women.
- How does Emily relate to Cathy on stage?
- How does Charlotte relate to Bertha?



Natalia Tena

EXERCISE:

Read the stage directions and the section of script below. This highlights the difference between Bertha and Charlotte (and Charlotte as Jane).

ROCHESTER ADVANCES TOWARD BERTHA. HE STRETCHES OUT HIS HAND. BERTHA WHIMPERS, HER EYES FILLING WITH TEARS. SHE REACHES TOWARDS HIM. SHE TRIES SUDDENLY TO KISS HIM ON THE MOUTH. BUT ROCHESTER PUSHES HER AWAY, APPALLED. BERTHA CLINGS TO HIM BECOMING INCREASINGLY SEXUAL. ROCHESTER STRUGGLES WITH BERTHA WRESTLING HER TO THE GROUND AND FINALLY PINNING HER DOWN. CHARLOTTE AS JANE STANDS BESIDE ROCHESTER.

'That is my wife, whom I married fifteen years ago in Spanish Town, Jamaica. And this (INDICATING CHARLOTTE AS JANE) is what I wished to have. This young girl who stands so quiet, so grave at the gates of hell. Look at the difference. Compare this sweet form, these dear eyes, this angel with that animal. Then judge me.'

In pairs create a scene, perhaps in a café or public place, one person is A, the other B. A is controlled and wants to behave as the best society expects (good manners/modest behaviour/smart accent and so on), while B wants to break these social customs, B wants to break free, behave as a naughty child and so on. A must prevent B from this at all cost.

EARLY REVIEWS

Charlotte Brontë was very determined to be well thought of and well judged. She and Branwell both decided that they may be able to turn their literary skills into an opportunity to earn a living. Branwell and Charlotte had been creating stories for many years based on the adventures of the the kingdom of Angria. They decided that they needed the advice and judgment of those who were already professional writers, so both embarked upon a course of letter writing to their literary idols. So on December 29th 1836 Charlotte Brontë wrote to Robert Southey the Poet Laureate asking for his opinion on some of her poems. And this was his response:

'The daydreams in which you indulge are likely to produce a distempered state of mind. Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties the less time she will have for it even as recreation. To these duties you have not yet been called but when you are you will be less eager for celebrity.'

Charlotte responds with the following:

'Sir, I cannot rest until I have answered your letter'.

At first I felt only shame that I had ventured to trouble you. A painful heat rose to my face when I thought of the quires of paper I had covered with what once gave me so much delight. The letter I wrote you was senseless trash from beginning to end. I have since endeavored not only to observe all duties a woman ought to fulfill but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed for sometimes when I am sewing I'd far rather be reading or writing but I try to deny myself.

'Once more allow me to thank you with sincere gratitude. I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print'.

Southey's attitude that women should look to careers as a wife and mother only, were not unusual in the nineteenth century. Indeed Patrick Brontë often urged his daughter to be content with fulfilling her duty and not to allow unattainable ambitions to sour her life. Charlotte's novels have a constant theme within them pointing out that there were practical alternatives to the conventional role of women as 'goddess of the hearth':

'I believe single women should have more to do - better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now.'

EXERCISE:

Read the following extract from the play: Charlotte and Branwell are children creating their own fictional kingdom:

BRANWELL JUMPS UP ONTO THE TABLE AS IF STANDING AT THE PROW OF A SHIP. CHARLOTTE CLIMBS UP BESIDE HIM. THEY BOTH CARRY WOODEN SOLDIERS.

BRANWELL: The General stands at the helm and shouts for his men. SHOUTS A-hoy. They see before them the mighty rocks where waves crash and splinter.

CHARLOTTE: CLIMBING DOWN FROM THE TABLE AS IF ENTERING THE FOREST. They are dazzled by the beauty of the island. The glittering sands stretch before the verdant rain forest. Beneath the panoply every leaf drips and sweats. There are huge pungent flowers that blaze at night and die in the morning. There are butterflies as big as your hand.

In groups of around 5, sit in a circle. Each person creates a line of a story. The lines must follow and make some sense – no matter how fantastical! Give your story a title, for example: 'The Unknown Island', or 'The Magical Adventure!'

Act the story out exactly as it was told, you must create the scenes and images within the story.

As an alternative and to parallel Charlotte and Branwell's own competitiveness you could begin your story with Fortunately... the next person's sentence begins Unfortunately, then Fortunately and so on.



**'THE DOOR
OPENS AND
PATRICK
STANDS IN THE
DOORWAY. HE
HAS ONLY A
LITTLE SIGHT
LEFT AND HAS
USED A STICK
TO NAVIGATE
THE JOURNEY
TO THE
KITCHEN'**

SCENE STUDY

Read the scene in groups, discuss it and then consider the questions below

EMILY PICKS UP THE DOG LEAD. SHE PUTS ON HER COAT.
SHE PICKS UP THE MANUSCRIPT OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS FROM THE CHAIR.

CHARLOTTE Has Father had his midday tea?

EMILY It's half past twelve.

CHARLOTTE I know the time.

EMILY Then he has had it.

CHARLOTTE And his drops.

EMILY In the cupboard. They are due in half an hour.

CHARLOTTE I know.

EMILY We managed for a year without you.

SILENCE

EMILY WHISTLES TO HER DOG. AS SHE IS LEAVING CHARLOTTE CATCHES
EMILY'S ARM.

CHARLOTTE It was not my choice to go away. I didn't choose to spend my
every moment with a spoiled girl and a miserable baby. To be
ordered about 'til I was dead on my feet day after day. I did it for
you. That you might be here and not parted from what you must have.

EMILY Then let me go to it.

THE DOOR OPENS AND PATRICK STANDS IN THE DOORWAY. HE HAS ONLY A LITTLE
SIGHT LEFT AND HAS USED A STICK TO NAVIGATE THE JOURNEY TO THE KITCHEN.

PATRICK Why are there voices raised in my kitchen?

CHARLOTTE Father. You should have rung. You should not-

PATRICK I should. I should not. It is not for you to tell me what I should or
should not do. I should not have had to leave my chair if it hadn't
been for your quarrel. What is it about?

CHARLOTTE We were...in disagreement over what to cook for dinner. PAUSE. Emily
has made soup but I would rather-

PATRICK
TO CHARLOTTE. Go and remake the fire in my study.

CHARLOTTE LEAVES. EMILY STANDS, STILL DRESSED IN HER COAT AND HOLDING
THE MANUSCRIPT OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS. SILENCE. PATRICK REACHES OUT AND
TOUCHES THE MANUSCRIPT. CATHY STIRS.

PATRICK What are you reading?



**'EMILY READS
WITH CATHY
REPEATING
THE WORDS
AS SHE PULLS
FEATHERS
FROM HER
PILLOW.'**

EMILY A book.

PATRICK Is it good?

EMILY I...don't know. I have not yet finished it.

PATRICK But you must have an opinion..

EMILY It is...unusual.

PATRICK Unusual. I am intrigued.

EMILY It is not so very interesting...

PATRICK Read it to me.

EMILY It would not be to your taste.

PATRICK How do you know? PAUSE. Whatever is in front of you.
The next sentence. What is it?

EMILY READS WITH CATHY REPEATING THE WORDS AS SHE PULLS FEATHERS
FROM HER PILLOW.

EMILY That's a pigeons,

CATHY Pigeon's.

EMILY and that's a wild duck,

CATHY A wild duck.

EMILY and that...Who is that?

CATHY IS LOOKING AHEAD AT HER FACE IN AN IMAGINARY MIRROR.

EMILY Oh Nelly. Who is that face?

CATHY Who is that face?

EMILY Who is it that moved just now?

CATHY Who is it? And again. Who is that lady in her expensive gown?

PATRICK And?

EMILY She asked, gazing earnestly at herself in the
mirror.

PATRICK Yes?

EMILY PROTESTING. I do not think it -

PATRICK Read on.



BRONTË

by Polly Teale

Q

After reading through a scene with the actors, Polly asks lots of questions about the scene. What characters want, what might prevent them from achieving their wants, what has happened just before the scene and so on. Here are some examples of the questions a director might ask, are there other questions you would like to ask your actors if you were directing this scene?

- How does Charlotte feel about her last year away?
- Why does she tell her Father that the argument was only about the dinner menu?
- How does Emily feel about reading her work out loud?
- Does Patrick know that it is her manuscript and not just a book someone else has written?
- How complicit is Emily with Patrick in pretending it is just a novel and not her work?
- How exposed does she feel?
- Why does Patrick ask her to read? Is it cruelty or an act of love?
- What does he feel about Emily?

How would you stage this scene? Is Emily aware of Cathy or is it just us the audience who see her? What is the level of tension? What are each characters objectives? Physically what is in the room and how does that affect the scene? What about Patrick's near blindness?

EMILY

READING. And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it was her own reflection. It was herself, surrounded by feathers she had torn from her pillow. I rose and covered the mirror with a shawl.

CATHY

It is behind there still. And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone. Oh Nelly, the room is haunted. I am afraid of being alone.

EMILY

It is yourself. Catherine Linton. Wife of Mr Edgar Linton and mistress of this fine house. You must stop this at once and come to your senses before your husband hears your nonsense.

CATHY

She watches me. Don't leave me. Tell her to go away. Tell her I do not know her. Tell her I...How did she get in here? -

EMILY

Father -

PATRICK

You are right. It is...unusual. Tonight we shall eat in the dining room and eat well. You will help your sister to prepare the meal. You may use the rest of the week's house keeping. It is an occasion is it not. I am to see my only son.

EXERCISE:

Pick a section of the scene and work on it with your group, decide on the area you want to work in. Is it in the round? Proscenium? Traverse? What props/furniture are you going to use if any? Your scene doesn't have to be naturalistic, you can change elements of the script if you wish, for example you can repeat lines or have two actors play one part simultaneously. Present it to the rest of your class.

TIME-LINE FOR THE PLAY

This play is not a drama documentary on the lives of the Brontë family; it is as Polly Teale describes it 'a response to the Brontë story not a biography'. The cast drew up a time-line of key events in their characters' lives that they found important, or it was considered useful to agree on as a group in order to understand for example how long Anne and Branwell worked away from home, or how long their Father had been nearly blind for and so on.

1824	Emily and Charlotte at Cowan Bridge (School) with Maria and Elizabeth (their sisters)
Jan 1825	Atlas and note book given to Branwell
Feb 1825	Maria sick at Cowan Bridge and brought home
May 1825	Maria dies at Haworth
June 1825	Elizabeth sickens and all three girls pulled out of Cowan Bridge – Elizabeth later dies
1835	Branwell's trip to London
June 1838	Branwell sets up as a portrait painter in Bradford
May 1838	Branwell's business fails – debts/pregnant girl
Jan - Jun 1840	Branwell works as a tutor and is dismissed
Oct 1840	Branwell goes to work for the railway
April 1842	Branwell dismissed from the railway for financial irregularities/theft? /drink?
June 1842	Discovery of Emily's poems by Charlotte
Autumn 1842	Heger/Tutor experience for Charlotte
Feb 1843	Charlotte goes to 'little kittens' job after agonising over tutor
May 1843	Charlotte returns from 'kittens' job. Branwell and Anne leave for Thorp Green
Dec 1843	Poems 'readied' and sent off whilst all at home on hols
Feb 1844	Charlotte off to 'spoilt child/miserable baby' job at Sedgwick's
May 1844	By now Anne knows of Branwell's affair
June 1844	Patrick too blind to read
Apr 1845	Charlotte back home from Sedgwick disaster. Pushing poems for second time
May 1845	Bell Nichols arrives at Haworth. Patrick almost completely blind
June 1845	Emily receives letter from Anne Anne and Branwell return permanently from Thorp Green



WHAT DO I WANT?

Each character in the production has a 'want', something that drives them through their lives and the play. This is called the Super Objective. Also there is an 'obstacle' that stops them from achieving their objective.

During rehearsals, Polly, the director and the actors discussed what each character's objective and obstacle might be. These are never carved in stone as through the rehearsals ideas grow and change. I have included as many of the characters as possible.



Character:

EMILY - Diane Beck

Super Objective: To be true to herself.

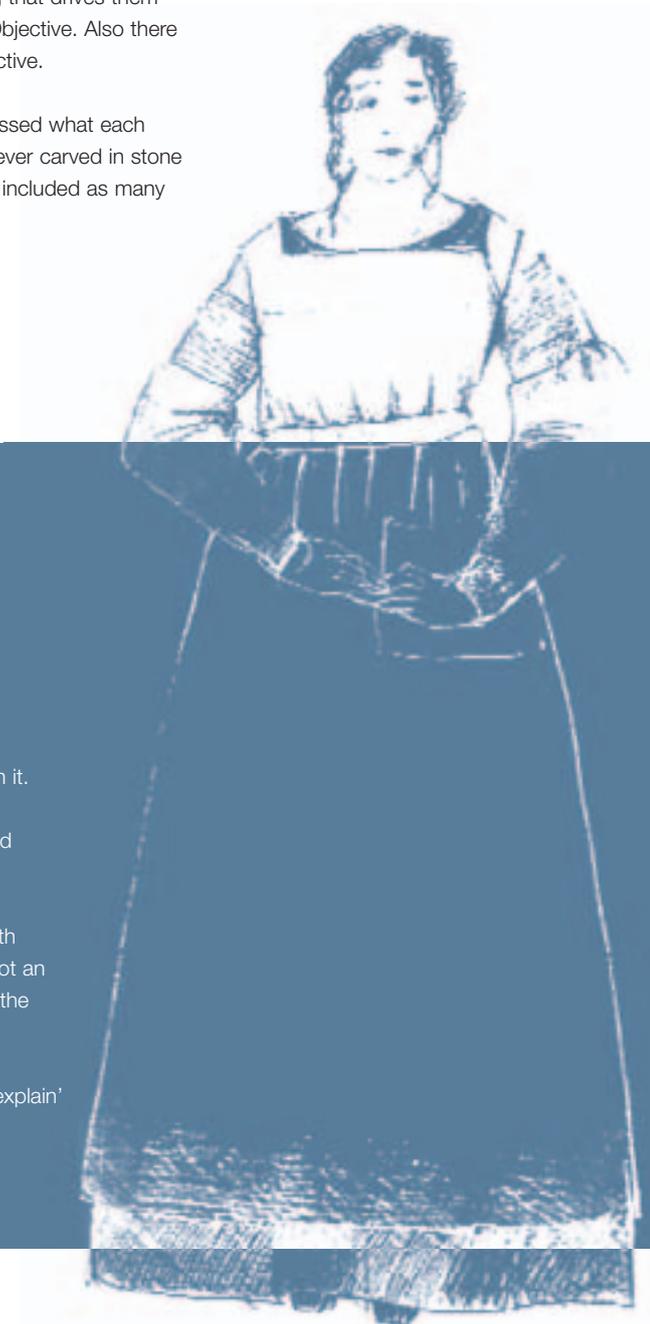
Obstacles: Anger at the world and her sense of failure for being unable to live in it.

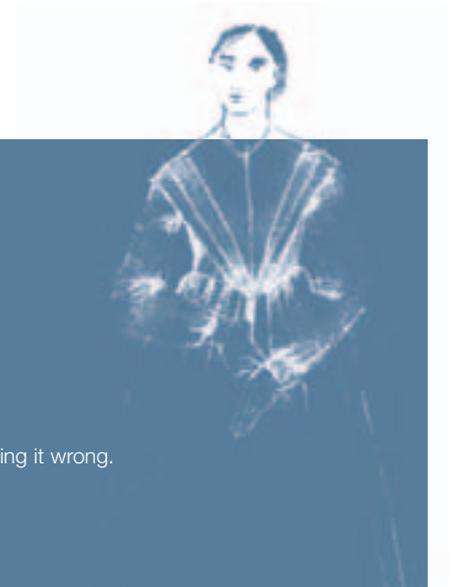
Favourite Line: 'There is no stranger thing on this earth than to watch life depart and leave the body empty... What are we? Where do we go?'

I like this line because it is an insight into the fear and fascination with death that Emily has, and shows her search for truth. This truth is not an inherited religious truth from her father, but a longing to understand the re-uniting of Cathy with Heathcliff.

'We write to lose ourselves... whole worlds we cannot, should not explain'

This I like because it is an insight into her experience of living through words.



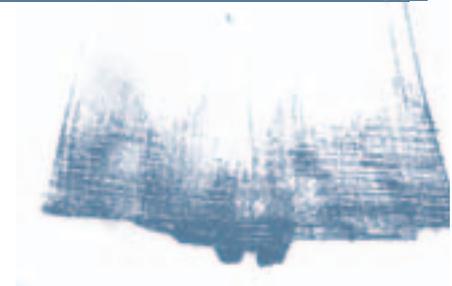


Character: **CHARLOTTE - Fenella Woolgar**

Super Objective: To be recognised and valued. To be 'forever known'.

Obstacles: Doubt of ability and low self esteem. Fear that Emily is a better writer and worry of getting it wrong.

Favourite Line: 'How dare you humiliate me because I have had no life'



Character: **ANNE - Catherine Cusack**

Super Objective: To be useful/ to repair the world by ending all pain and injustice.

Obstacle: That life is meaningless. That God is cruel and I am bad, pointless and selfish.

Favourite Line: 'Why is it not enough to be?'



PATRICK - David Fielder

Character:

Super Objective:

To live a responsible life which is elevated by God and art.

Obstacle:

Fear of obscurity/failure.

Favourite Line:

'To make of our lives what we would'

I like this line because it reflects the incredible journey of his own life.



BRANWELL - Matthew Thomas

Character:

Super Objective:

To be a figure of admiration.

Obstacle:

Fear that he is not exceptional and therefore he is nothing.

Favourite Line:

'But he is bought back to life by a magic potion'

Character:

HEGER - David Fielder

Super Objective:

To be a great artist of literature.

Obstacle:

Can't execute what he can teach/understands

Favourite Line:

'You must choose your words as you would choose a weapon.
That it may do precisely as you intend'



Character:

BELL NICHOLS - David Fielder

Super Objective: To live a useful life

Obstacle:

A fear of a lack of faith and therefore a
fear of a lack of passion.

Favourite Line:

'You will not come to regret your... (decision)'

I like this because he looked after Patrick after
Charlotte's death for a further 6 years even though
Patrick had tried to stop the marriage.

Character:

BERTHA - Natalia Tena

Super Objective:

To be worshipped and adored/to always
capture attention.

Obstacle:

Fear of rejection due to family
madness/worthlessness.

Favourite Line:

'Want you, I want you. Hot little itch. Wound
weeping, red raw from scratching, won't stop,
can't stop, help me'





Character:

ROCHESTER - David Fielder

Super Objective:

To find the perfect partner.

Obstacle:

Fear of rejection.

Favourite Line:

'Then judge me'



Character:

CATHY - Natalia Tena

Super Objective:

To be at one with nature and go back to her primal self.

Obstacle:

Fear of the consequences and the need to be safe/have status.

Favourite Line:

'I've had dreams that have changed my ideas, and gone through me and through me, like wine into water, altered the colour of my mind'



Character:

HEATHCLIFF - Matthew Thomas

Super Objective:

To have Cathy to make himself whole/to be welded to her for eternity

Obstacle:

That he is not worthy of her because he is broken, worthless

Favourite Line:

'I cannot live without my soul'

EXERCISE:

Two chairs are placed in the empty space and two actors each sit on a chair. Each actor is given a 'want', for example:

- To Punish
- To want forgiveness
- To enthuse
- To freeze
- To protect
- To blame

Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person and in the room, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sound needed!

One person 'speaks' by moving their chair in relation to the other person and the space, then the second actor 'answers' by moving his/her chair.

They pursue their 'want' in opposition to their partner. Their objective is to win their case and to change/dissuade the other actor of theirs.

CHARACTERS

THE GHOSTS:

Cathy - from *Wuthering Heights*

Natalia Tena

Bertha - from *Jane Eyre*

The Brontë Family:

Patrick

David Fielder

Charlotte

Fenella Woolgar

Branwell

Matthew Thomas

Emily

Diane Beck

Anne

Catherine Cusack

David Fielder also plays:

Rochester from *Jane Eyre*

Arthur Bell Nichols, Patrick's curate

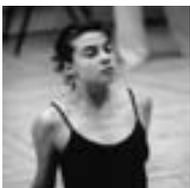
Mr Heger, Charlotte's teacher

Matthew Thomas also Plays:

Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*

Arthur Huntington from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

All other parts are played by the company



Natalia Tena



David Fielder



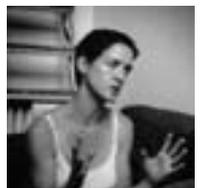
Fenella Woolgar



Diane Beck



Matthew Thomas



Catherine Cusack



WRITING A REVIEW

Guidelines for writing a review.

- Say what you saw
- Say what you think
- Reflect on your responses
- Write freely from the heart

- Don't worry about given theories
- Create your own theories

- Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
- Question that moment
- Find out what it says to you
- Say why it spoke to you

CONSIDER

- The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
- The set, the costumes, the style of the production

The Objects:

- The pillow case full of feathers
- The china tea set
- The embroidery
- The note books/manuscripts
- The suitcases

- The themes
- The characters
- The story
- The ending...

(and try to say everything you want in just 300 words!)

Send your review to:

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