

**The Moors, by Jen Silverman. Directed by Tracy Liz Miller.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman on BerkshireBrightFocus.com**

"But then sometimes I think, who would I be if I weren't depressed?"



Kate McMorran as Emilie, Molly Parker Myers as Huldey, Lori Evans as Mallory. Photo by John Sowle

What defines the world "Outrageous?" I think it is Jen Silverman's play "The Moors," now on stage at Bridge Street Theatre in Catskill, NY. Over the past several years I have fallen in love with this playwright's work, mostly through two very different styled works at the Williamstown Theatre Festival (go to Archives to find reviews of "The Roommate" and "Dangerous House"). In this work we find Silverman in a very different set of moods. She has written a period piece (Time: The 1840s. . .ish), and (Place: The bleak moors. . .of England?) with a cast of characters that remind of us other people we've been aware of: Agatha and Huldey, two sisters living in a rundown manse on the moors - just like the Bronte sisters; an impressionable governess (take your pick from Jane Eyre or Henry James' ghost tale); a Mastiff considered dangerous (Sherlock Holmes and the Baskervilles) but who is a lovesick puppy; a devastating maidservant or servants (Mrs. Danvers in "Rebecca"); and a Moor-Hen. Note to audience: this is a very funny play about a very savage subject - jealousy and its inherent depravity.

Emilie, an impressionable Governess, after losing several children to suspicious deaths, arrives at the Moors home of Agatha and Huldey, sisters who have issues with one another and with their brother Branwell who has mysteriously disappeared. Her arrival brings confusion and further disorder into the lives of the sisters and their two maids - one with Typhus and one with child. Or is she? Or who is she? Is she Marjory or Mallory, parlor maid or scullery maid, or housekeeper or cook? Just who she is and how she fits into this household of, now, four women is one of those secrets to be explored.

April Armstrong plays Agatha the stern and controlling sister and Mary Parker Myers plays the scatter-brained, romantic sister Huldey. They are a fantastic pairing, each one providing the necessary contrast to make their relationship work. Each time you think you've nailed them all things change and you're back on the track of who is what and why is where.

Both sisters establish a relationship with the new governess, Emilie, played sweetly and gently by Kate McMorran, an actress who does confusion to perfection. Through the genius of John Sowle's set design every room in the house looks exactly like every other room which truly confuses poor Emilie. This is practically existentialism come to life.

Love rears its idyllic head in the case of The Mastiff - a very fine performance by Shane Sczepankowski - and a Moor Hen with a flying challenge - the perfect sarcasm of actress Bonnie Black. Their philosophical and life choice dialogue is just the opposite of that given to Emilie and Agatha who find that deception leads to lust in the most remarkable fashion.

The maid, or maids, are brought to erotic life by Lori Evans. For the longest time her two identities, beautifully defined by the way, are the lightest of motifs in this play, but late in the game she becomes the coach and mentor of influenceable Huldey. As she forces the story to become the murder play we've always anticipated her face, body and voice darken into an almost mythical monster, Rebecca's mythic housekeeper evolved into something not of this earth. In a six-character parody it was amazing to watch this dissatisfied woman become the person behind the wheel of the truck that drives the play.

Tracy Liz Miller has directed this piece with complete conviction. Every moment is realistic even in its most impossible way. She knows how this material resonates and she takes advantage of the fine writing and the excellent company of players to make material merge with each of the six minds delivering it. She understands the style here and she amplifies it to perfect point. I couldn't have liked it more. And she has some wonderful technical help.

John Sowle's set is wonderful to watch as it evolves from a stunning interior to a wild exterior. His lighting is gloriously moody and right for every moment of the play. Jennifer Anderson's costumes define each character perfectly and the transition in Huldey is more than modified in her costume shift. Steven Patterson's sound design keeps the play on its perfect level throughout the show. Touted to run 90 minutes the first performance, a preview, ran almost to two hours which could be difficult for a one-act play, but this one is so enthralling that I don't think anyone noticed or was bothered by the extra time.

This is, simply put, a delightful experience with something for everyone. You don't need to know the examples copied by Silverman to enjoy this play. You just have to watch and listen and enjoy the experience. Don't expect social commentary here, just the fun of a new take on an old-fashioned theatrical world.