



‘WUTHERING HEIGHTS’ REIMAGINED: A *Comparative Analysis of Emily Brontë's Masterpiece and its 2011 Cinematic Adaptation*

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Abstract: This research paper delves into the immortal classic *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and its renowned 2011 adaptation directed by Andrea Arnold. The paper contains the findings of a meticulous comparison of characters, plot, narrative structure, dialogue, and setting between the original novel and its celluloid counterpart. This study aims to disclose the filmmaker's unique interpretation and reimagining of the tumultuous relationship and haunting love story between Heathcliff and Catherine. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the novel's adaptation, the paper sheds light on the intriguing process of transposing a literary work onto the cinematic canvas. Ultimately, this exploration enriches our understanding of the enduring literary and cultural significance of *Wuthering Heights* within the realm of film adaptation. Viewing the adaptation through the lens of the 2011 version allows us to gain a deeper appreciation of Emily Brontë's narrative and its continued resonance with audiences across generations.

Index Terms - adaptation, film, celluloid, *Wuthering Heights*, character, dialogue, plot.

INTRODUCTION

In his book *Film and/as Literature*, John Harrington estimates that around one-third of all films are adapted from books; if we consider plays or short stories and other literary genres, this figure can even reach around 65%. From the beginning of theatres, films, and television, literature has been an important influential factor. Many works of classic literature have been adapted for celluloid many times in multiple languages and locations. It is a general tendency of people to compare books with their screen adaptations. Many people believe that adaptations can never surpass the original text. This idea is supported by the fact that readers are initially introduced to the plot in the book. The writings of the Brontë sisters have been on the choice list of filmmakers due to their immortal themes and characters.

Emily Brontë acquired fame with her only novel *Wuthering Heights*. In 1847, Emily published *Wuthering Heights* under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, which was initially met with mixed reviews but has since become recognized as a classic of English literature. Emily Brontë's writing is known for its passionate intensity, vivid descriptions of nature, and exploration of the supernatural. She was also a gifted poet, and her poetry is noted for its haunting and atmospheric quality. However, Emily's literary career was cut short by her untimely death at the age of 30, likely from tuberculosis. Despite her short life, Emily Brontë's contribution to literature has had a lasting impact, and her work continues to inspire readers, writers, and filmmakers today.

LITERATURE ON CELLULOID:

The first question that arises in our minds while talking about adaptation is; what is the need of picking up stories from literature? There could be various reasons why filmmakers might choose any story of a previously written work to bring it on celluloid. One reason is that the originally written work has already created a devoted audience who are fascinated by the story and who want to see the story brought to life on celluloid. The admired novels or other works of fiction are more likely to be seen on screen since they have already been well-received by people. Another reason could be the enthralling characters and the plot of the work. A filmmaker is always interested in introducing such compelling stories or characters to a large audience who may not have exposure to the original text yet. Adaptations are also a way for filmmakers to pay tribute to the original text and cherish its themes and ideas in the minds of new audiences forever. There are about ten film versions of the novel *Wuthering Heights* in different languages including English, Spanish, Japanese, French, and Hindi. The first appeared in 1920 and the latest in 2011. The novel is also adapted for TV films and series about sixteen times. Specifically, I have selected the latest adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* for the study, i.e. the 2011 version directed by Andrea Arnold.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS (2011) BY ANDREA ARNOLD

Andrea Arnold's version of *Wuthering Heights* stands out for its gritty and darker interpretation of the story. This adaptation is different from other adaptations as it casts a black actor, James Howson, as Heathcliff which is a significant departure from other productions. Kaya Scodelario plays the role of Catherine Earnshaw. Robert Burnstein, Kevin Loader, and Douglas Rae are the producers of this version. Andrea Arnold and Olivia Hetreed together wrote the script of the film. During the 2011 Venice Film Festival, the movie had its world debut in the competition. The film duration is 2h 8m.

The movie is split into two parts. The first part follows the story of Heathcliff's childhood incidents and his developing relationship with Catherine Earnshaw, while the second part centers on Heathcliff's bitter feelings of revenge against the Earnshaw and Linton families.

THE PLOT OF THE NOVEL VS. FILM

Arnold's adaptation deviates from the source material as it includes more overt scenes of violence and sexuality to depict the raw emotions of the characters. The technique of using natural lighting and handheld camera work heightens the raw and realistic atmosphere in the film. The plot of both the novel *Wuthering Heights* and its 2011 adaptation center around the tumultuous and complex relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw.

The adaptation, just like the source novel, is set in the Yorkshire moors. The harsh landscape of the moors plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative and the characters. The wild and uncontrolled emotions of the characters are depicted through this harsh terrain which serves as a metaphor and also highlights the sense of isolation and loneliness that they experience.

Another similarity between the novel and this film is the central theme of love and its destructive power. The passionate and complex relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, in both the novel and the film, is a driving force behind the plot. They have such passionate feelings for each other that they do even not realize that the choices they are making in their lives are so destructive which will ultimately lead to their downfall. The theme of love and destruction is explored in a very affecting and haunting way in the film as well as the novel.

While this adaptation remains faithful to the novel in several ways, we can still see some notable differences between the two in terms of the plot and characterization. A departure from the novel can be seen in the non-linear narrative structure of the film, which deviates from the novel's linear structure. Wyler pays more attention to the childhood experiences of Heathcliff and Cathy. The film explores their deep bond and the racial and class barriers that keep them apart. The story is told in a fragmented way; a non-linear narrative. It features scenes from different periods scattered throughout the film. This approach is employed to evoke the fragmented memories and emotions of the characters.

The storyline of this film deviates from the novel's storyline, particularly in the way that certain events are depicted. For example, the novel does not explicitly showcase the scenes of violence and abuse; the novel is more suggestive and leaves more to the imagination of readers. But the film shows a much more explicit depiction of the violence and abuse that takes place between Heathcliff and Cathy.

CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL VS. FILM

The first thing that strikes our mind while talking about characterization here is the character of Heathcliff. The decision of casting a black actor James Howson as Heathcliff has been praised for adding an interesting layer to the exploration of race and class issues in the story, as Nelly Dean states in the novel that Heathcliff may have been of mixed race. He has been described as a "dark-skinned gypsy". It also contributes to the character's sense of isolation and alienation from the other characters in the film. He is a brooding character with a fierce passion for revenge. But his portrayal differs from the source text as he is portrayed as more vulnerable and emotionally expressive in the film, whereas he is depicted as a brooding and unemotional character suppressing his emotions in the novel. The film features several scenes where Heathcliff is shown crying on several occasions. This emotional weakness is particularly evident in his interactions with Catherine for whom he possesses deep passion. The traumatic childhood experiences of Heathcliff and the mistreatment he receives from Hindley are shown deeply affecting his mind. This agony develops a desire for revenge against Hindley and the other characters who have mistreated him.

Another difference between the novel and the film lies in the portrayal of Catherine. Brontë depicted Catherine as a complex and passionate character. She is seen struggling to reconcile her love for Heathcliff with a fervour for social status and security. Throughout the film, Catherine is portrayed as a wild and free-spirited character who is drawn to Heathcliff's intensity and passion. She is shown to have a deep connection with Heathcliff with whom she shares experiences of growing up together on the moors. However, she is also aware of the social and economic barriers that separate them and struggles to make a balance between her desire for Heathcliff and her desire for a more secure and stable life. In the film, Catherine is depicted as an emotional character, often acting on impulse rather than reason. This is evident when she decides to marry Edgar Linton, despite having deep feelings for Heathcliff. Her instinctual nature is seen in her tendency to run away and disappear for long periods.

There are also some differences in the portrayal of supporting characters. For example, in the novel, the character of Isabella is depicted as a feeble and foolish character who is easily manipulated by Heathcliff. However, the film portrays Isabella as a stronger and more independent character who makes her own choices. The character portrayals in this version focus more on exploring the raw emotions and complexities of the characters, particularly concerning issues of class and race.

DIALOGUE IN THE NOVEL VS. FILM

The dialogues in the 2011 film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* differ significantly from the original novel as it uses much modern language; reduced, altered, and new dialogues according to the need of the situation.

a) Modern language: The film uses modern language, much as opposed to the formal and archaic language of the novel, for making it more accessible to contemporary audiences. The film also includes Yorkshire dialect and accents, which may be indecipherable for some viewers. In the film, when Mr. Earnshaw brings Heathcliff to his house, he refers to him as a "little waif", instead of using the term "gypsy boy" used in the novel. It is a more modern term that conveys the same meaning.

In the film, young Cathy's dialogue is often more modern and informal than the language used by the character in the novel. For instance, when she says goodbye to Linton in the novel, she says "I'll call when you are up." But in the film, she uses the expression, "Bye then, see you later!" Modern audiences relate more with such dialogues which are expressed naturally.

b) Reduced dialogue: The director chose to rely more on visual storytelling and the raw emotions conveyed through the actors' performances rather than expressing them through words. For achieving this, the technique of reducing dialogues is employed in the film. In Chapter 6 of the novel, there is a conversation between Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean about Heathcliff's behaviour during his visit to Thrushcross Grange. The novel contains a lengthy and detailed conversation where Nelly provides a lot of information about Heathcliff's past and his relationships with the other characters. The conversation ranges over several pages. On the other hand, this conversation is condensed and simplified in the adaptation to reduce the chance of making the viewers bored with such a lengthy account. There is a brief exchange between Mr. Lockwood and Nelly about Heathcliff that goes like this in the adaptation:

Mr. Lockwood: "What's the matter with Heathcliff?"

Nelly Dean: "He doesn't like being cooped up. He'll be glad to get back to the moors."

The novel contains many lengthy conversations between Catherine and Nelly Dean where Catherine discloses her feelings about Heathcliff and Edgar to Nelly, and Nelly advises her, whereas the film condenses or completely leaves out these lengthy conversations altogether. The emotions of the characters are conveyed more through their actions and interactions with each other.

Another example of reduced dialogue in the film is seen on the arrival of Heathcliff to Wuthering Heights after a long absence in the novel. On his return, his servant Joseph greets him with a long-winded speech in the novel where he complains about Heathcliff's behaviour. But the film features this scene with only a few words exchanged between the two characters. The emphasis is laid more on their body language and facial expressions instead of dialogues to convey the tension between them.

In the novel, there is a scene in which Catherine, Heathcliff, and Hindley sit down to dine together after Heathcliff has returned to Wuthering Heights. During the meal, Hindley makes some improper and insulting remarks to Heathcliff. Catherine and Heathcliff exchange glances and subtle gestures of support. In the film, the camera focuses on the three characters' faces as they eat their food. There is minimal dialogue. Hindley makes one insulting remark to Heathcliff, and Catherine and Heathcliff exchange a meaningful glance, but there is no extended conversation between the characters.

c) Altered dialogue: Some of the dialogue in the film has been altered or condensed for the sake of brevity and to fit the non-linear structure of the film. For example, some scenes are portrayed with minimal dialogue, relying instead on the actors' body language and facial expressions to convey emotion. Here is an example from the novel:

"He's not a human being," she retorted; "and he has no claim on my charity. I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me. People feel with their hearts, Ellen, and since he has destroyed mine, I have not power to feel for him." (Chap. XVII)

The film features this scene with the following dialogue:

"He's not a person, he's a devil," she says. "He took my heart and squeezed it until it burst, then he threw it back at me. People feel with their hearts and since he destroyed mine, I have no feelings left for him."

As you can see, the dialogue in the film adaptation is more modern and less formal than the dialogue in the novel. Additionally, the scene in the film takes place in a different context and is presented in a different way than it is in the novel, highlighting the differences in how the two mediums tell the story.

In the novel, when Catherine and Heathcliff are arguing, Catherine says, "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now," to which Heathcliff responds, "And it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now. So, he shall never know how I love him." (chap. IX). In the film, this dialogue is condensed and altered as Catherine simply says, "You and I are both haunted. We are both cursed." This change emphasizes the emotional intensity of the scene and conveys the characters' feelings more instinctively.

In chapter 16 of the novel, when Catherine is on her deathbed, she says to Nelly, "I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being." This iconic line from the novel is omitted in the film adaptation. The film depicts Catherine's emotions through a series of haunting visual sequences that convey the same sense of desperation and obsession.

d) Addition of new dialogue: The film also includes some new dialogue that is not present in the novel. One example of a new dialogue between Hindley and Heathcliff in this film is when Hindley confronts Heathcliff about his relationship with Catherine. Hindley accuses Heathcliff of being a terrible influence on Catherine and warns him to stay away from her to which Heathcliff responds, "You can't keep her away from me. We're the same. We belong together." This exchange of dialogue between these two characters reveals the extent of Hindley's jealousy towards Heathcliff and also highlights the class discrimination between the two characters. In the novel, Hindley is always seen rebuking Heathcliff as his interactions with Heathcliff are mostly hostile, so this additional dialogue highlights the underlying tensions between them.

CONCLUSION

The 2011 adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* by Andrea Arnold is known for its naturalistic and gritty approach to the story. The film features a more diverse cast than previous adaptations of the same novel, with Heathcliff being portrayed as a black man. The characterization of the main characters is done with a greater emphasis on their inner lives and motivations. The film is appreciated by the audience for its striking cinematography, which captures the harsh beauty of the Yorkshire moors. The film is unique as it uses a 4:3 aspect ratio and a handheld camera to create an immersive and intimate viewing experience. The film uses a non-linear structure, with flashbacks and time jumps. This non-linear structure allows the film to explore the psychological complexities of the characters and their motivations more artfully than previous adaptations. The film addresses the themes of identity and belonging, with Heathcliff's quest for belonging as he is an outsider; 'a gipsy-boy'. With a special emphasis on the role of the servant characters, such as Nelly Dean and Joseph, the film also emphasizes the themes of class and social inequality. The unpolished portrayal and raw emotions of the 2011 adaptation offer valuable insights into the enduring themes of love, revenge, and redemption that make *Wuthering Heights* a classic of English literature.

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