



[Wuthering Heights](#)

Screened at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) November 2011

I first read Wuthering Heights as an impressionable teenager – I read it through in one night, captivated by the sexy hero and the doomed affair, this was love and it was dangerous. In **Andre a Arnold**

's raw new film we are transported back to that passionate reckless teenage love.

In her previous features, *Red Road* and *Fish Tank*, Arnold drew wonderful performances from little known and non-actors, once again she has turned to 'real' people. The teenage lovers are played by Shannon Beer and Solomon Glave, with 23 year old James Howson, an unemployed black Yorkshireman. And from casting choice to performances there is a tough reality to this film, adaptations of the classics frequently ignore race; but in the 18th and 19th centuries the fortunes which built the stately homes of England were built on slavery and sugar. In the novel Emily Bronte specifically refers to the "black Heathcliff", as a gypsy, and a little Lascar, meaning an Indian seaman, he is a stranger destined to destroy the thin veneer of civilisation that covers the elemental Yorkshire moors.

Heathcliff is brought home by Cathy's father, Mr Earnshaw played by Paul Hilton. The child is adopted in the spirit of cold charity, but living with the family Heathcliff and Cathy develop a relationship outside of society, they are truly feral children. Their passionate friendship is a wild and natural affair, living according to their own rules they achieve an equality that race, birth and

money would deny them as adults.

The poetic and savage landscape is the other star of this film, shot by one of contemporary cinema's most talented cinematographers *Robbie Ryan*, it is cold and wet and there is always a storm on the horizon. The characters seek beauty and redemption in a harsh and brutal land.

This film is not flawless and I found the first half more powerful. But I believe that literary classics should be open to a variety of interpretations, as we see with Shakespeare. We recently saw a more traditional production of *Jane Eyre*, directed by Cary Fukunaga and starring Mia Wasikowska and Michael Fassbender. It was a film I very much enjoyed – the performances, including a number of great British actors were impressive, particularly Wasikowska, as a very independent and self aware *Jane Eyre* true to Charlotte Bronte's vision. But I would argue that it is the Andrea Arnold film that would encourage new readers to turn to the work of the Brontes.

There are three great young film-makers working in Britain today; respectively they began as an artist, a photographer and a children's TV presenter. In Steve McQueen, Lynne Ramsay and Andrea Arnold we have three tremendous talents – fortunate are the actors who can work with them and the audiences who await their next work.