

Andrea Arnold Finds New Way to Capture ‘Wuthering Heights’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 30, 2012 - 10:36am

- [Andrea Arnold](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Emily Bronte](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [James Howson](#) [6]
- [Kaya Scodelario](#) [7]
- [Movie Review](#) [8]
- [Wuthering Heights](#) [9]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Andrea Arnold continues to make the case that she’s one of the world’s most interesting filmmakers with the unexpected creative success of her adaptation of “Wuthering Heights,” a story that may not at first seem to fit in her narrative framework but proves to be a perfect choice for this multi-talented filmmaker. Bringing the grit and realism that made “Red Road” and “Fish Tank” such dramatic forces, Arnold doesn’t merely adapt Bronte’s story but retells it in her own style, creating a film that can be frustratingly languid to start but becomes mesmerizing as it progresses, fully transporting the viewer to a world with characters that most of us know in a story English majors could tell you by heart and somehow makes it feel new. Arnold takes Bronte’s work and makes it both more realistic and more poetic. She makes daring decisions and even if all of them do not pay off, the effort is worth a look.

Heathcliff (James Howson) returns to the place where young love first bloomed with Catherine (Shannon Beer while young, Kaya Scodelario older). We learn of the arc of Heathcliff, played by a black man for the first time even though his race could have been easily inferred from Bronte’s story. Heathcliff’s ethnicity plays a major role in the story, adding another layer to the gap between the doomed lovers other than class. The story then flashes back to the how Heathcliff was adopted by Catherine’s father and how they became closer than siblings before returning to present day in which Heathcliff has now made something of himself and returns for Catherine. The first half (the youth half) is much stronger than the adult half, mostly because the actors simply aren’t very good in the final act of the film when emotion is required to carry the piece.



Wuthering Heights

Photo credit: Oscilloscope

Arnold focuses primarily on the doomed young love of “Wuthering Heights” and she does so almost entirely through imagery instead of

dialogue (at least she does so in the film’s strongest chapters). We’ve become accustomed to versions of classic novels that are dense with obtuse, allegedly period-genuine dialogue, often merely serving to make sure viewers know exactly what’s going on at every turn. Characters in period pieces often over-explain both narrative and plot to make sure viewers don’t fall asleep. Arnold takes the opposite tack, presenting viewers with large chunks of narrative completely dialogue-free. The way two young people flirt with each other as they cross a windy field. She’s just running ahead, looking behind to make sure he’s following. The imagery is timeless. It doesn’t need explanation.

However, for some viewers it will be torturous to watch the numerous shots of bugs on a window sills and wind through the weeds (Arnold seems virtually obsessed with the natural world of her piece, focusing on dirt, flame, and the elements of the setting as much as the faces of its characters). Arnold keeps her camera so close to her actors, often allowing it to bounce as they run or sway as they walk, that one can practically feel the wind against it. The aesthetic choice makes for a degree of grit and realism that’s often missing from period pieces but it undeniably leads to a few chapters that will make some audiences drowsy. I found myself sucked into this world more often than not but I understand why some would be put off by Arnold’s sometimes languorous approach.

Whatever “Wuthering Heights” lacks in urgency it makes up for in artistry. Arnold films the moors on which her story takes place with a poetic grace that feels both dirty and beautiful simultaneously. She finds the truth of the moments in ways that many who have tackled Bronte’s material have failed to do – through the skin and the dirt upon it instead of the lavishly designed costumes.



Wuthering Heights

Photo credit: Oscilloscope

Some of the performances by the relative unknowns, especially the adult versions, seem a bit awkward and unnatural. When the older Heathcliff and Catherine meet up again years later, there’s a passion missing not from the filmmaking but from the performers. They’re simply not very good, which is surprising given Arnold’s gift at drawing truthful performances from her ensembles in the past. Perhaps she was so entranced by the non-performer elements that she lost focus on the characters. In that reunion scene, the way light bounces off a chandelier and shoots rays around the room seems more interesting than the characters in it.

Ultimately, “Wuthering Heights” is a worthwhile film for the risks taken by and pure talent of its filmmaker even if I would consider this a slightly lesser work than “Red Road” or “Fish Tank.” Those films had a little more dramatic urgency and didn’t seem quite as self-important or conscious of their own design as the worst moments of “Wuthering Heights.” However, those worst moments never overwhelm what works about this adaptation – the fact that it is further proof of the remarkable creativity of one our most interesting directors.

“Wuthering Heights” stars James Howson, Solomon Glave, Shannon Beer, and Kaya Scodelario. It was adapted from the book by Emily Bronte by Andrea Arnold & Olivia Hetreed and directed by Y. Arnold. It is unrated and was released in Chicago on November 30, 2012.



[10]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [11]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [10]

Source URL (retrieved on *Apr 23 2024 - 10:52am*):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/20716/andrea-arnold-finds-new-way-to-capture-wuthering-heights>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/andrea-arnold>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brian-tallerico>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/emily-bronte>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/james-howson>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/kaya-scodelario>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/wuthering-heights>
- [10] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#BRIAN>