



The Contents and Contexts of the Three Adaptations of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

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1. Introduction

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is considered to be one of the most extraordinary and bizarre novels in English literature. Its uniqueness has been emphasized by many critics. F.R. Leavis, for example, called it a novelistic "sport" (quoted in Allen 194). Walter Allen expressed the same idea in other words:

[i]t is utterly unlike any other novel. There is nothing one can compare it to, for the great masters of form have chosen subjects so different from it as to make *Wuthering Heights* exist in a category of creation all its own. It can be translated in no alternative terms; the usual compass bearings of criticism do not apply; nor do the usual abstractions the critic makes from the totality of a work go far towards piercing the mystery (Allen 194).

No wonder that in the century and a half since its publication, the novel has been continuously exposed to a vast array of different, often contradictory construals (e.g. "as an allegory of class conflict, a microcosm of generational tensions, [...] a response to Romantic tradition" (Macovski 363), "a metaphysical dissertation" (Watson 86), "a psychological study of an elemental man" (ibid 88), etc.). One of the critical trends is the so-called "hermeneutical approach" (ibid 380) which acknowledges the impossibility of a single meaning and lets "the problematic mysteries and open questions of *Wuthering Heights* to live a life of their own" (Macovski 364). As J. Hillis Miller has put it,

[t]here is an error in the assumption that there is a single truth about *Wuthering Heights*. This secret truth would be something formulable as a univocal principle of explanation which would account for everything in the novel. The secret truth about *Wuthering Heights*, rather, is that there is no secret truth which criticism might formulate in this way. No hidden identifiable ordering principle which will account for everything stands at the head of the chain or at the back of the back. Any formulation of such a principle is visibly reductive. It leaves something important still unaccounted for. This is a remnant of opacity which keeps the interpreter dissatisfied, the novel still open, the process of interpretation still able to continue (Miller 368-369).

In other words, no construal can account for the entire system of elements in Bronte's novel.

If we view adaptations as interpretations of literary works set out on screen (and not on paper), it becomes apparent that, as a target of adaptation designs, Bronte's enigmatic novel harbours a serious pitfall. On the one hand, it offers a fertile ground for filmmakers to showcase their interpretative and paraphrasing skills and thus cordially invites attempts to transpose it to the screen. Indeed, *Wuthering Heights* has become one of the most often adapted works of literature in the English-speaking world. The earliest film version appeared in 1920, when the cinema was still silent; the latest adaptation, the so-called "MTV's *Wuthering Heights*," came out in 2003. In a span of almost a century, the novel has yielded a rich crop of both big-screen and television remakes. On the other hand, Bronte's text is so multifaceted and remarkable that it makes any filmic emulation of its extraordinary complexity impossible. In this connection, any screen version of *Wuthering Heights* seems to be an ideal prey for fidelity criticism concentrated on exposing deficiencies and discrepancies in filmic transpositions.

Since the early 1980s, the field of film and literature has been painfully trying to evict the discourse of fidelity from its methodological and conceptual apparatus. By the late 1970s, the centrality of the fidelity criterion had brought the adaptation studies to a dead end trapping scholars in the practice of churning out "twenty-page articles:"

The sheer number of these articles, their dogged resort to the individual case study, the lack of any evidence of cumulative knowledge development or heuristic potential – all these factors suggest that, as a discipline, film and literature largely remained in what Thomas Kuhn called a "pre-paradigmatic state" (Ray 44).

In his article "The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory" published in 1980, Dudley Andrew openly proclaimed the necessity of a "sociological turn" (Andrew 14). He urged scholars to use adaptation "as we use all cultural practices, to understand the world from which it comes and the one toward which it points" (ibid 16-17), that is, to finally turn attention to the context in which filmic texts are immersed. Viewing adaptations in their context, however, implies discarding the "binary source/adaptation straitjacket" (Aragay, 18) centered around "one single question: 'How does the film compare with the

book''' (Ray 44) and acknowledging the plurality of influences under which they come into being, i.e. their intertextuality. As Christopher Orr points out:

By placing the notion of adaptation within the theory of intertextuality, we can describe the literary source as one of a series of pre-texts which share some of the same narrative conventions as the film adaptation. This description obviously does not exhaust the film's intertextual space, which also includes codes specific to the institution of cinema as well as codes that reflect the cultural conditions under which the film was produced. [...]The danger of fidelity criticism, even when it is dealing with the most 'faithful' of film adaptations, is that it impoverishes the film's intertextuality either by ignoring the other codes that make the filmic text intelligible or by making those codes subservient to the code of a single precursor text. (Orr 72).

It is exactly from the perspective of "cultural influences" that I have decided to approach adaptations of Bronte's classic. For my analysis, I have chosen big-screen English-speaking dramatizations, of which there are three: the 1939 one directed by William Wyler and produced by the Samuel Goldwyn Company, the 1970 one directed by Robert Fuest and produced by the American International Pictures, and the 1992 one directed by Peter Kosminsky and produced by the Paramount Pictures. All three adaptations have kept the original title of the novel and are thus openly acknowledged re-workings of Bronte's text. Nonetheless, each of them retells the nineteenth century classic in its own unique way in accordance with the specific contextual circumstances.

I have decided to juxtapose the three films in question without making any reference to the literary original and proceed from the assumption that, despite being a derivative of a novel, an adaptation may still be regarded as a separate and independent artistic creation. Here, I fully agree with George Bluestone, who claimed that:

when the filmist undertakes the adaptation of a novel, given the inevitable mutation, [...] he does not convert the novel at all. What he adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel – the novel viewed as raw material. He looks not to the organic novel, whose language is inseparable from its theme, but to characters and incidents which have somehow detached themselves from language and, like the heroes of folk legends, have achieved a mythic life of their own. Because this is possible, we often find that the film adapter has not even read the book, that he has depended instead on a paraphrase by his secretary or his screen writer. [...] the filmist becomes not a translator for an established author, *but a new author in his own right* (Bluestone 62, my italics).

According to Bluestone, an adaptation takes "the subject, or story," of a literary work not only to fashion it into a different form, but also into *a different content*. He adduces the following example. A sad and desperate woman at a station watching the approach of a train is "the raw material of reality" that can be transformed into various artistic contents. When the beholder begins to think of her as a character in a novel and of how to render her thoughts in words, one artistic content is formed. When, however, the beholder begins to imagine Greta Garbo as Anna Karenina, quite a different one is born (Bluestone 62-63). In this understanding, a literary work

is connected to its film version through a thin umbilical cord of raw material. This raw material detached from its original form and content is the only thing that the novelistic and the filmic share. As Bluestone has put it:

Like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point then diverge. At the intersection, the book and shooting-script are almost indistinguishable. But where the lines diverge they not only resist conversion; they also lose all resemblance to each other. At the farthest remove, novel and film, like all exemplary art, have, within the conventions that make them comprehensible to a given audience, made maximum use of their materials. At this remove, what is peculiarly filmic and what is peculiarly novelistic cannot be converted without destroying an integral part of each (Bluestone 63).

In other words, it is impossible to change the form (from the novelistic to the filmic) without also changing the content. Due to a whole number of interconnected factors (a limited running time, an audiovisual mode of presentation, technological and financial constraints shaping the production process etc.) the filmmakers cannot escape making rearrangements, omissions, additions, substitutions or/and confluences of the source material. Any alteration to the content (irrespective of whether it has been dictated by formal or conceptual concerns) will inevitably result in a greater or smaller thematic transformation. The conception of an adaptation as an independent work of art allows to regard filmic remakes as having their own themes and agendas, i.e. their own content, which is not supposed to coincide with the original one.

In my analysis, I will focus on the portrayal of the relationship between the two protagonists, Heathcliff and Catherine. Each cinematic transposition endows this relationship with its own specificities and meanings. In the sections that follow, I will first take a look at the content interpretations and then discuss the contexts that have contributed to its creation.

2. Contents

First of all, I would like to outline the logic according to which my description will proceed. Fundamentally, all three cinematic Heathcliffs and Catherine are characterized by wildness of spirit, rashness and tempestuousness. These qualities bond each of the three pairs of characters into a deep and close friendship, provide the cement for their insurmountable attachment to one another and, as such, serve as the driving engine for the progression of the narratives. So long as their spiritual unison dominates their existence and remains undisturbed by outward circumstances, the cinematic protagonists live happily and self-containedly. The ever-growing dissonance starts manifesting itself when the characters' spiritual harmony begins to be

overbalanced by their mismatched reactions to the pressures of the material world. The roots of these incompatible reactions are different in 1939, 1970 and 1992 *Wuthering Heights* and can be traced to the heroes' childhood and adolescence, when their relationship was still a harmonious one. Each adaptation suggests its own reasons for Catherine's "betrayal" and Heathcliff's "revenge" and its own conception of the distribution of power between the two protagonists. The three descriptions below will follow this general blueprint for analysis.

2.1 1939 *Wuthering Heights*

The wildness of spirit of Wyler's characters finds a dramatic expression and is realized in chivalry and romance. From an early age, Heathcliff and Catherine take refuge from life's troubles by climbing up to Penistone Crag, where the daring and resourceful Catherine leads all their games and invents an imaginary kingdom. There Heathcliff is of noble birth: a son of a Chinese emperor and an Indian queen, "a prince in disguise" who has been "kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England", an owner of a magnificent castle, a dazzling knight who fearlessly fights against villains (0:15:06-33 WH1). In their fantasy world, Catherine treats Heathcliff not merely as her peer, but as a superior at whom she looks with adoration and worship. She tries to cultivate the sense of nobleness in him by frequently addressing him as "milord" and by letting him feel himself admired and appreciated.

Enjoying this fairy tale in equal measure, the characters, however, have very different attitudes towards it. Being a true romantic at heart, Heathcliff takes it in a serious manner: much more gravely than he takes his real life. At *Wuthering Heights*, he is a ragged and grimy stable boy who is despised, beaten up and bossed around. Catherine's attractive alternative to this world of oppression and humiliation becomes his reality for a while. "What does it matter? Nothing is real out there. Our life is here" (0:21:24-31 WH1), he once says to Catherine. Because his strong sense of dignity, self-respect and purposefulness is completely satisfied at Penistone Crag by Catherine's attention and fondness, the miserable side of his existence at *Wuthering Heights* is of little importance to him. He uses his will-power and tenacity to persevere in his dire condition despite all insults and abuses in order to be with the woman he loves: "I've stayed here and been beaten like a dog. Abused and cursed and driven mad, but I stayed just to be near you. Even as a dog! I'll stay till the end. I'll live and I'll die under this rock" (0:22:37-48 WH1).

Catherine's romanticism, on the contrary, is counterbalanced by her pragmatism. As she is growing up, the former quality is gradually subsiding and the latter is coming to the fore together with ambition, upward mobility, waywardness, capriciousness and flightiness. Although she feels that Penistone Crag is a perfect place for her untamed and impulsive temperament ("No matter what I ever do or say, this is me now standing on this hill with you. This is me forever." (0:33:01 WH1), she never really forgets that it is just a game. In contrast to Heathcliff, she cannot ignore the reality and is intent on being a queen in real life too. At a certain point she realizes that Heathcliff is quite content to be "dirty and unkempt and in rags" (0:22:07 WH1) and that this is what is awaiting her too if nothing changes. Because she prefers "dancing and singing in a pretty world" (0:23:02 WH1) to "liv[ing] in haystacks and steal[ing] food from the marketplaces" (0:22:30 WH1), she tries to push him towards some serious action ("Why aren't you a man? Heathcliff, why don't you run away? [...] You could come back rich and take me away. Why aren't you my prince like we said long ago? Why can't you rescue me?" (0:22:12 WH1)). When Catherine sees that her urges do not have any effect on him, she starts contemplating marriage with Edgar Linton which could save her "from this disorderly, comfortless place" (0:42:02 WH1) and give her a heavenly existence. However, a talk to Ellen makes her realize that she does not belong in heaven:

I dreamt once I was there. I dreamt I went to heaven, and it didn't seem to be my home. I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth. The angels were so angry, they flung me out in the middle of the heath on top of Wuthering Heights. I woke up sobbing with joy. That's it, Ellen! I have no more business marrying Edgar than I have of being in heaven. (0:42:17-41 WH1).

Due to a tragic misunderstanding, though, Heathcliff becomes convinced that Catherine has completely deserted him for "that other world" (0:33:44 WH1) and finally manages to tear himself away from Wuthering Heights. Torn between who she is and who she wants to be, Catherine decides to write off her Penistone Crag experience as "a strange curse" (0:49:58 WH1) and in her new capacity as Edgar's wife gradually becomes "quite the lady of the manor," "presid[ing] over Thrushcross Grange with quiet dignity" (0:52:19 WH1). Childhood wildness and romanticism seem to be set aside forever. However, when in a couple of years Heathcliff returns with his memories of a different Catherine, her wild nature awakens again and clashes with the comfort, security and domesticity of her married life. Scared of her weakness in the face of the past, she does everything to keep Heathcliff at bay, but that only serves to increase his pressure.

He is driven by the desire to win her back and comes back specifically for that single purpose. Rich and suave, he longs to return things to how they used to be and tries to blackmail

Catherine into their bygone happiness by his humiliation of Hindley and his marriage to Isabella. Rather than being a malevolent and gloating retaliation, his emotional cruelty is an unwilling and forced measure in which he takes no real pleasure and satisfaction. Tormenting others, he torments himself in the first place. Ironically, having followed Catherine into that other worldly realm and having gained everything that he lacked there (money, status and polish), he feels much more miserable than he did as a stable boy. Then, he was a dazzling prince, now he feels only "hunger and pain" (1:24:29 WH1) like a pauper. In the past, he unwillingly but steadfastly endured abuses to be with Catherine, now he just as unwillingly and steadfastly inflicts them to be with her again. In fact, he feels himself a victim rather than an aggressor:

If you ever looked at me with what is in you, I'd be your slave. If your heart were stronger than your fear of God and the world, I would live silently contented in your shadow. But no. You must destroy us both with that weakness you call virtue. You must keep me tormented with that cruelty you think so pious. (WWWH 1:17:42-1:18:04).

This monologue betrays Heathcliff's total dissatisfaction with the real power he now has, because, in fact, it makes him powerless to change anything. On the contrary, he wishes to revive those days when he was subordinate and dependent, because then he wielded unconstrained power in Catherine's imagination. Like some actors, he feels much better playing a role than living a reality.

The tragedy of the situation lies in the fact that the married Catherine is also powerless to alter the situation. Realizing in the end that she does not need that "handful of worldliness" (1:31:47 WH1) after all, she is unable to go against conventional morality and break marital vows ("I'm another man's wife" (1:12:31 WH1)). Intoxicated by her memories of the Penistone Crag days, she falls ill and dies, refusing to combat the romantic wildness of her spirit that seeks to tear her away from heaven where she does not belong. Through her death, she acts out her dream of being flung out of paradise. Many years later, Heathcliff finally manages to leave his hell on earth and join her on top of Wuthering Heights, where the two can no longer be disturbed by reality and its temptations.

2.2 1970 Wuthering Heights

The wildness of spirit of Fuest's characters finds a kinesthetic expression and is realized in rowdy physicality. The second pair of Heathcliff and Catherine also has a secluded world of their own at Penistone Crag, but it is a den for animals or a cave for savages, not a castle for a prince and a queen. The games of Fuest's protagonists are based on active and mischievous physical

action rather than on detached and dreamy fantasizing. They pull faces, run and romp around, ambush and chase each other, cry and laugh their lungs out. Such deferential appellations as "milord" and "milady" would be truly absurd for them: the two call each other in a far less ceremonious manner ("you rotten pig!" (0:22:46 WH2), for example). If the harmony of romantic wildness of Wyler's characters is gradually destroyed by Catherine's growing fascination with the material world and by Heathcliff's total denial of it, the harmony of impish wildness of Fuest's characters is disrupted when they almost simultaneously start undergoing two opposite processes due to sudden exposure to the concerns of everyday life: Catherine is culturalized while Heathcliff is further barbarized.

Throughout his childhood and adolescence Heathcliff enjoys a privileged position in the Earnshaw family. The master of the household lavishes his fatherly affection and trust on him at the expense of his own son, whom he scolds and thrashes on a regular basis. Suspecting that Heathcliff might be Mr Earnshaw's illegitimate child, Mrs Earnshaw is even afraid that he can inherit the estate in defiance of the law. However, Heathcliff's superior status stays indisputable and unchallenged only while he remains under the protection of his adoptive parent. When Mr Earnshaw dies, the illusion of supremacy and privilege dissolves and Heathcliff starts realizing that he is a mere "Gypo" and "lascar" in the eyes of other people. In contrast to Wyler's hero, whose personal tragedy results from a sudden loss of the imaginary universe, Fuest's hero enters his period of trials and tribulations when he is unexpectedly tumbled down from the top to the bottom. Bound by his pledge to Catherine to never leave her and *Wuthering Heights* and quickly realizing that he is not actually in a position to be rebellious and openly oppositional, he grudgingly accepts the rules that are foisted onto him by Hindley. Unusually hard and dirty manual labour and a prohibition on reading books soon add a darker and sharper dimension to his savageness formerly counterbalanced by education and Mr Earnshaw's fondness. A mischievous and cute whelp, who is vulnerable and harmless, turns into a ferocious and dangerous wolf, who has the power and skill to attack.

Catherine's savageness, on the contrary, undergoes a kind of domestication. Naturally uninterested in social mobility, she discovers the world of fine manners and dresses quite by chance when she has to spend some months at Thrushcross Grange after being bitten by a dog. The time spent with the genteel and refined Lintons makes her aware of the existence of a completely different life. This experience in socialization is akin to the biblical Eve's loss of innocence after tasting the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Catherine no longer can indulge in her primeval utopia without a certain degree of shame and embarrassment. Moreover, she also loses

her blitheness and starts to think strategically. The only way for her and Heathcliff to be together and to be free is to leave Wuthering Heights, which has become a place of continual conflict between her brother and her soul mate. And that cannot be achieved without money. With her brother gradually turning into a drunkard and a gambler and with the coarsened Heathcliff seeming to be totally unable to support a family ("He is a wild animal. [...] We'd be forced to live like beggars" (0:41:33-41 WH2), she knows that the only way for her to get access to financial resources and to "get Heathcliff away from Hindley" (0:42:53 WH2) is to find a wealthy husband.

Heathcliff does not get a chance to learn about her real motivation in accepting Edgar's proposal and runs away with bitterness in his heart. Catherine waits in vain for his return and marries Edgar out of gratitude and loneliness, rather than for prestige and wealth, which, in contrast to Wyler's heroine, she does not really care for at all. When, having found "good fortune" (0:56:40 WH2), Heathcliff returns, she is unable to resist his advances and is ready to accept him as her secret friend and lover, but is not ready to discard her married life altogether and hurt Edgar, who has helped her so much.

Unlike Wyler's Heathcliff, Fuest's protagonist does not want to be Catherine's slave and live "silently contented in her shadow". If the transformation of Wyler's hero is reluctant and burdens him, Fuest's character likes his newly acquired glitz and tries to demonstrate it to everyone as much as he can. His attitude to power is also very different. After his return, he wants to be the one dictating the terms and enjoys the feeling of dominance over the people who used to hurt him so much. He is far less confident than Wyler's Heathcliff, though. The latter knows the strength of Catherine's feelings for him and resorts to cruelty to combat her indecision. Fuest's hero is not so sure about his place in Catherine's heart and uses cruelty against Hindley and Isabella as a tool for selfassertion. Torn between tenderness and aggression (he actually hits and pushes Isabella several times during the film), he desperately seeks proof that Catherine loves him as much as he loves her. For him, her unwillingness to give up her husband is a clear indication that she is trying to make him a pawn of his infatuation again. That puts him on the warpath and draws him into the phantom power struggle with her:

Heathcliff: I do what I want!

Catherine: No, you don't! You do what I want. [...] I've got something to say to you.

Heathcliff: No, I've got something to say to you. Look, I want you to understand that I know how I've been treated. And if you flatter yourself that you've deceived me or that I didn't know it, then you're a fool. I went through hell for you. And if you think it's only me that's going to suffer then you'd better think again (RF 1:10:51-11:22).

A victim of his own insecurity (rather than of Catherine's virtue and piety as is Wyler's Heathcliff), he exaggerates Catherine's invulnerability and strength out of all proportion and by far overdoes his defensive attacks on her and the people she cares about. Incapable of neglecting her sense of duty and devotion to Edgar and seeing the sufferings of those involved, she falls ill. The wildness of her spirit once again finds a physical outlet, this time in fits, thrashings, ravings and howls; being pregnant with Heathcliff's child, she dies in premature childbirth. After her funeral, Heathcliff becomes insane, turns violent and is shot down like a wild animal. Their spirits set off wandering the moors together.

2.3 1992 Wuthering Heights

The wildness of spirit of Kosminsky's characters finds a metaphysical expression and is realized in supernatural mysticism. Giggling and fidgeting during Bible readings and boldly making fun of the Christian sensitivities of others, the third pair of Heathcliff and Catherine have little reverence for established religion. Their perception of the world is animistic, rather than theistic. They believe that all natural entities and phenomena (birds, trees, winds, stones etc) have a soul and are open for communication. The protagonists spend their childhood and adolescence enjoying nature ("the open moors, the rock and the lowering skies" (0:10:32 WH3)) and engaging in sense-making interaction with it. In their games, Heathcliff casts himself as a guru who knows all about the unseen life of the surrounding landscape and as a mentor who tries to teach Catherine the basics of extrasensory perception. In fact, he even tries to make her part of this transcendent reality by sending her spirit into a tree.

So long as Catherine is fully enchanted by the otherworldly spell, both characters are merry, happy and contented. Trouble begins when the natural harmony between the master and the apprentice is disturbed by the rude interference of the external circumstances. Kosminsky's Heathcliff is close to Wyler's in certain respects. He is relegated to the status of a farm hand very early in his childhood and finds an alternative reality for himself in a non-material world. However, in contrast to Wyler's Penistone Crag kingdom, which is created by the power of Catherine's imagination, Kosminsky's moors are suffused with animistic energy by Heathcliff himself. While in the former version Catherine, to a large extent, feigns (or rather acts out) subordination and submissiveness, in the latter she is really looking up to Heathcliff: in their games the two remind a child and a grown-up. Like Wyler's characters, Kosminsky's protagonists have different attitudes to their spiritual bond and this is the main reason for their

ensuing conflict. As the more grown-up companion, the leader and the “author” of this supernatural realm, Heathcliff takes the relationship very seriously; as the junior mate and follower, Catherine sees it as an exciting and amusing pastime at first.

When Catherine gets the chance to know the Lintons closer, she discovers a novel and interesting game for herself: that of playing a lady. Pretty dresses, vivacious dances, courteous and sophisticated conversations – all these glitzy trappings of civilized society capture her imagination. Like an inquisitive child who is easily distracted by new shiny toys, she forgets about Heathcliff for a while and concentrates entirely on her image as a lady. Her slighting attitude towards her former playmate (“Should I always be sitting with you? You might be dumb for anything you say to amuse me. [...] That’s no company at all, when people know nothing and say nothing” (0:29:00-23 WH3)) is akin to teenagers’ disappointment in and embarrassment about their former, more “childish” toys. Heathcliff takes his dethronement from a guru to an ignoramus in Catherine’s eyes painfully. Thinking that he has lost control over her thoughts and interests, he cannot help stalking and harassing her. His proclivity to overcome her slight in a sadistic way evidences itself right from the start (e.g. when he puts a wire mesh over a lapwing nest starving the nestlings while waiting for Catherine’s return from the Lintons).

Catherine’s decision to accept Edgar’s proposal is a mischievous but at the same time strategic prank through which she is trying to overcome the unsettling realization that she is really in love with Heathcliff, whom she is convinced she cannot marry. Heathcliff, however, does not stay to listen to her confession long enough to hear the most important part that she pronounces in the style that he has nurtured: “My love for Linton is like foliage in the woods. Time will change it as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff... It’s like ... It’s like the eternal rocks beneath. A source of little visible delight but necessary” (0:33:15-34:05 WH3). The distraught hero leaves the Yorkshire moors and thus robs Catherine of the joys of her childhood and of a reason for living. Similarly to Fuest’s character, Kosminsky’s heroine also marries Edgar out of loneliness. Thinking within her lost friend’s frame of reference, she decides to “uproot” (0:43:07 WH3) herself from the now heathcliffless “eternal rocks” of Wuthering Heights and plant herself at the “sheltered” and “crimsoncarpeted” Grange (0:17:46 WH3), turning from a wild tree into a decorative pot plant. A transfer in the opposite direction is impossible. When Heathcliff returns and starts claiming her back in his violent and domineering way, she loses her bearings altogether. At the Grange, her childlike lightness of perception fails her and she falls terminally ill.

If the emotional cruelty of Wyler's hero is forced and reluctant and the physical aggression of Fuest's protagonist is insecure and self-protective, the eerie brutality of Kosminsky's character is sadistic and fanatic. He is a control freak totally fixated on one single object. In contrast to the other two Heathcliffs, one of whom desperately longs to return the past and the other just as desperately seeks proof of love, Kosminsky's Heathcliff wants to own and control Catherine and everything that has any connection to her: Wuthering Heights, the Grange, her brother, her nephew, her daughter. This obsession is so strong that it lasts for many years after Catherine's death. He is particularly driven mad by the young Cathy Linton, whose airiness and light-heartedness reminds him of the flighty childishness of her mother Catherine, which, in Heathcliff's view, lied at the root of their tragedy. He does everything to make "weeping" Cathy's "chief diversion" (1:15:22 WH3) after her father Edgar dies, but she proves remarkably buoyant and in the end helps Heathcliff come to terms with his diabolic, uncontrollable anger and desire for revenge. He dies peacefully with memories of his beloved Catherine as a little girl: the way she looked when he just got acquainted with her. As in the preceding versions, the spirits of the protagonists are reunited on the moors.

3. Contexts

As can be seen from the above discussion, each pair of characters differs considerably from the other two. The adaptations retain only the basic matrix of the relationship: Heathcliff's single-minded fixation on Catherine and Catherine's painful oscillation between the hero and her other fancies and commitments. The three films flesh out this essential model with very different personality traits and drives, thus creating new cinematic contexts in which the protagonists' relationship acquires unique nuances and shades of meaning. The next logical step is to understand which contexts have contributed to the creation of these construals.

3.1 1939 *Wuthering Heights*

A mainstream Hollywood film, William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* was released in 1939. The bearing of the time and place of its production on its treatment of the raw material in question is hard to overestimate. One of the most significant con-texts in the intertextual space of this adaptation apart from Bronte's novel is the so-called Hollywood Production

Code (aka Hays Code). It was adopted by the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association in 1930 and soon became obligatory and enforceable for all movies made within the mainstream production system. The code's three general principles introducing a detailed list of guidelines and prohibitions (termed "particular applications") read as follows:

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation (ArtsReformation.com).

As is obvious, Hollywood's self-censorship at the time made the portrayal of the novelistic Heathcliff's "wild world of sadism, bestiality, and violence" (Lawson-Peebles 5) a practical impossibility as this would not have been approved by the relevant authorities. As Lin Haire-Sargeant has put it, Bronte created her character in order to accomplish "a daunting challenge" of telling "the story of a brutal, calculating sadist, the bane of two families over two generations, in such a way that by the end the reader's horror is overwhelmed by sympathy" (Haire-Sargeant 410). In the 1930s, there could be no question of transposing "the allure of [Heathcliff's] evil" (ibid) onto the American cinema screen.

Nor was there any desire on Wyler's part to do so. The director was working on the film not only in the context of Tinseltown's rigid self-policing, but also in the contexts of the escalating political and military conflict in Europe and the growing isolationist mood in the United States. In his article "European Conflict and Hollywood's Reconstruction of English Fiction," Robert Lawson-Peebles describes the prevailing American attitude to Britain's troubles in the following way:

While American popular opinion was overwhelmingly anti-Nazi, it was also not particularly pro-British. The brief period of alliance in World War I was widely regarded as an aberration from America's true isolationist stance, which came to a peak with the 'America First' movement of the 1940s. Anglo-American relations in the twenties and thirties were frequently poor. If many Americans looked with detestation on Nazi totalitarianism, they hardly regarded Britain as the site of a modern democracy (Lawson-Peebles 2).

Desperately needing US help in its confrontation with Germany, British government tried to use every opportunity to nurture interventionist feelings in Americans, and cinema was seen as a powerful propagandistic tool in this struggle for support. For various reasons, many in Hollywood were willing to agitate for the British cause and did that mostly by trying to convince people on this side of the Atlantic that Britain was a nation holding similar values and ready for reform. According to Lawson Peebles, Wyler was among these sympathizers.

Thus, his film can be seen as an "engaged political text" (ibid. 1) seeking to recast Bronte's novel as an image of "a modernizing England which [was] learning to reject class and inherited wealth in favour of democracy and love" (ibid). In other words, the director reworked the raw material of the novel into a thoroughly Americanized content to suit the tastes and ideals of its primary target audience, the Americans, and thereby to present Britons in a familiar and positive light.

Each of Wyler's protagonists is given the chance to showcase their virtues. Thus, Heathcliff is essentially a "goody" fully worth of sympathy and respect. Despite his emotional cruelty to others (which is forced and devoid of any glee) and his offer of an adulterous affair to Catherine (which is distraught and desperate), he exudes the air of dignity and nobleness. His attachment to the Penistone Crag fantasy makes him very American: an enthusiastic and faithful guardian of "a New World, an imaginative, sacred, protected, and egalitarian space removed from the oldworldly decadence" (Lawson-Peebles 7). Moreover, he is the meeting point for such other quintessentially American themes as tenacity, hard work, and self-made success. Wyler's Heathcliff is a realization of the American dream the only trouble with which is that, by a quirk of fate, it comes true in the wrong ("old") world.

In this sense, Catherine with her oscillation between romantic wildness and class snobbishness may be said to personify England on its slow but sure way from elitism to egalitarianism. This identification is further supported by the analogy that may be drawn between the heroine as the creator of the Penistone Crag kingdom and England as the "mother" of the New World. Like Albion, Catherine was endowed with the spirit of romance, liberty and equality which gave a powerful impulse to a wonderful alternative for the old way of life. In the heroine herself, however, just as in the mother country, this spirit was constrained by the false ideals of privilege and class-consciousness. After a long struggle, Catherine was able to discard them. So, presumably, can England.

On a less abstract level, Wyler's heroine also has another virtue highly valued at the time: integrity. Indeed, one of the "particular applications" of the 1930 Production Code stipulated respect for "the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home" (ArtsReformation.com). In contrast to her freedom-loving romanticism, which comes and goes, her high moral principles remain constant throughout. Of all three Catherines, she is the only one who refuses Heathcliff explicitly on the grounds of loyalty to her husband. Thus, we can see that, in Wyler's conception, the weaknesses of each protagonist are always

counterbalanced by his or her commensurate strengths. Ultimately, none of the two characters is cast in a negative light so that the target audience could enjoy the story told within the familiar frame of reference.

3.2 1970 *Wuthering Heights*

The 1970 *Wuthering Heights* was directed by an English director on English soil but under the aegis of the American International Pictures (AIP). Films produced by this company founded in the 1950s by James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff “inevitably bore [its] stamp, no matter who wrote, directed, or starred in the feature” (Film Encyclopedia). Fuest’s work is no exception here and reveals clear traces of the company’s philosophy, which is, thus, an important con-text in the intertextual network surrounding the adaptation. AIP’s core principles have been summarized in the so-called “A.R.K.O.F.F. formula”:

A-ction (excitement and drama), R-evolution (controversial or revolutionary ideas), K-illing (or at least a degree of violence), O-ratory (memorable speeches and dialogue), F-antasy (popular dreams and wishes acted out), and F-ornication (sex appeal, to both men and women) (Film Encyclopedia).

Although this checklist was originally developed for low-budget teen-oriented “beach party” and horror films in which AIP specialized, the template proved absolutely transferable to *Wuthering Heights* as well. Firstly, due to its unique strangeness and mystique, Brontë’s novel had become a well-known fairy-tale in its own right. Secondly, the introduction of action, violence and fornication to the screen version was in itself already a kind of revolution, yet not, however, because these ingredients were sensational in themselves. By the time the second adaptation was being shot, censorship on both sides of the Atlantic had become very relaxed. The old moral prohibitions of the British Board of Film Censors had been almost totally abandoned by 1970 (Richards 175) and the Hollywood production Code was officially scrapped in 1968. Thus, if in the fifties and early sixties AIP’s “A.R.K.O.F.F. formula” was employed in flagrant violation of the conventional production standards, its use in the seventies was not seen as defiant any more.

The situation with *Wuthering Heights*, though, was a bit different. On the one hand, the literary original suffused with a sinister, rough and dark atmosphere seems to invite bold and blunt transpositions to the screen. On the other hand, Wyler’s transformation of this classic into a nice and polite drawing-room romance in 1939 had become so successful and well-known in the English-speaking world that, for many admirers of the first sound version

(either of the contemporaneous or subsequent generations), its sweetness and delicacy had become the ultimate, classic way of "reading" *Wuthering Heights*. In these conditions of colonized perception of the novel, Fuest's (AIP's) decision to switch from an idealized conception of the raw material to a very down-to-earth one could indeed come across as if not fully revolutionary, then at least controversial.

Although action, violence and sex are the staple constituents in the "A.R.K.O.F.F. formula," in Fuest's film they function in a very specific way and have a special tonality. In the adaptation in question, they are hardly just an end in themselves to attract teenagers and young people. If that were the case, these components would probably have been more salient and pronounced. The Gothic and demonic elements in Bronte's book are very strong, so being really "honest" would imply a more graphic representation and a stronger supernatural dimension. Fuest's action, violence and sex are clearly of this world and strike the viewer as being very every-day. It is this commonplaceness that is the source of their revolutionary nature. Having turned the raw material of *Wuthering Heights* into a bizarre but beautiful love story, Wyler succeeded not only in "de-villanization" of Bronte's story in popular mind, but also made it more refined and fairy-tale-like. Fuest goes against the grain by foregrounding roughness and portraying characters who yell, use swear words, have blazing rows, and sometimes even manhandle each other, thus displaying typical characteristics of a dysfunctional and abusive family. Owing to the A.R.K.O.F.F. principles, the classic AIP films were very exciting and entertaining, but very unrealistic. Fuest's tactic, on the contrary, is to apply the template in a moderate and realistic manner but to a subject regarding which such an approach is least expected. Here we can observe the fusion of an American agenda with the British realist tradition.

The realist aesthetic has always flourished in British cinema (Brown 188). One of its brightest periods was in the late fifties-early sixties when the British New Wave (the so-called "kitchen sink dramas") set the tone in national filmmaking. Even though Fuest's *Wuthering Heights* was shot half a decade after the trend had faded, traces of the New Wave context can be nevertheless discerned in it. The following description of the kitchen sink cinema, for example, is perfectly applicable to the adaptation in question:

[New Wave] the films faced people's emotions head on and swept away what had grown to be regarded as dull studio artifice. Cameras went out and about, especially up north [...] Characters were not cosy couples in Mayfair or the shires, but working-class people, tart and passionate (Brown 188).

If Wyler's contexts predisposed him to ennoble and purify the emotions and passions of his protagonists, Fuest's intertextual space, on the contrary, encouraged him to make them more earthly and tangible. The director achieves his realism mainly by means of physicalization and sexualization of the story and, through that, pays tribute to another contemporary con-text, that of sexual revolution, which in the sixties started to liberate sex from the confines of marriage. If the love between Wyler's Heathcliff and Catherine is incorporeal and is consummated only after their death, Fuest's characters are made of flesh and blood and are very open-minded as far as physical contact is concerned. In contrast to 1939 Catherine, her 1970 counterpart is not stopped by the fact that she is "another man's wife." She has no marital scruples and willingly succumbs to Heathcliff's charms (earlier in the plot, for example, she conceives the plan of marrying Edgar to be with Heathcliff). As such, Fuest's Catherine represents an emancipated and active woman who is ready to take decisions and make her own choices. In this con-text, Heathcliff represents another recognizable type: a "leering rough-sex artist" (Haire-Sargeant 422), who is, however, riddled with insecurities and vanities typical of many young people of his age and tries to solve his problems by means of his "high-decibel sexuality" (ibid. 418). His frustration and jealousy find not just emotional but also physical expression (e.g. sexual seduction of Isabella, a vigorous and noisy fight at Edgar's house, physical aggression towards Catherine, etc.). As Haire-Sargeant has pointed out, his "emotion is all motion," differently from Wyler's character, whose "passion vibrates out of stillness" (Haire-Sargeant 420).

3.3 1992 *Wuthering Heights*

Peter Kosminsky's *Wuthering Heights* came out in 1992 and represents an intersection of two cinematic trends of the nineties. One of them may be termed as the "widespread return of the literary classics" (Corrigan 72). The end of the twentieth century saw an exceptional proliferation of adaptations of nineteen-century novels. According to Corrigan, this development was a reaction against devaluation and marginalization of "the force and reliability of narrative (as a way of knowing the world)" that had been taking place since the seventies and the eighties when even mainstream movies tended "to abandon or undermine complex or coherent characters, tight plot lines, and causal logics" (ibid). The fascination with the nineteen-century literature reflects "a post-postmodern yearning for good plots and characters with depth" (ibid). Another reason for this fascination, Corrigan supposes, may

lie in the fact that historically distant novels provide "a conservative or at least therapeutic turn from cultural complexity" (ibid). In contemporary societies, individuals are inundated with an unprecedented amount of fast-changing and disorienting images:

In contrast, movie adaptations of classic literature combine images of other times and places [...] and the conceptual and imagistic reductions needed to make and market literary films today [...]. The result is a literary image that acts as a packageable and comprehensible alternative to the other, much less comprehensible, images audiences live through today (ibid 73).

Following this logic we may surmise that Kosminsky turned to adapting Bronte's work not to pursue political and ideological goals (as did Wyler) and not to prove that the protagonists may be interpreted in modern terms and with modern templates (as did Fuest), but for the sake of the novel's original flavour, order and depth. For one thing, it adapts the novel in its entirety (and not just the first fifteen chapters); for another, it seeks to reflect the full measure of Heathcliff's wickedness by casting him as "a quiet, smiling torturer at play" (Haire-Sargeant 422).

Sara Martin points out, however, that despite "the film's dutiful fidelity" (Martin 56), it is firmly grounded in the nineties. And here we come to the second cinematic trend of the end of the century: the "focus on the villain" (ibid) when this figure "was given new depth quite beyond the habitual stereotypes – witness Hannibal Lecter" (ibid). This perspective

together with the generalized interest in abuse within families, gave cinema for the first time in decades the critical and cultural tools necessary to read Bronte's Heathcliff with absolute fidelity – perhaps clear-headedness is a better word – after a long spell of sentimental readings. [...] the 1990s were the decade in which male abusers of all kinds were publicly exposed (ibid 56-57).

If at the time Wyler was working on his version evil was unequivocally reprehensible, deserved only condemnation and had to be considerably mitigated in Heathcliff in order to make him likeable, then at the end of the century it began "to justify itself" (Haire-Sargeant 426), became attractive and "in its existential energy [turned into] an object of desire" (ibid), so that the audience had transformed from a censor into an accomplice. According to many observers, despite being "faithfully Victorian" (Martin 66), Kosminsky's Heathcliff is also "radically post-modern" (ibid): "the edge of irony to his sadism, his emotional aloofness, even his depressive personality – all these mark him as our own. In him these [...] supposedly negative aspects of masculinity are redrawn as positive" (Haire-Sargeant 426).

The con-text of the "male zeitgeist" (Martin 57, Haire-Sargeant 426) of the nineties is so salient in the intertextual ambience of the third adaptation that it pushes the female

element of the raw material into the background. With her accentuated infantilism and airiness, which later surface in her daughter and drive Heathcliff mad, Kosminsky's Catherine is neither a psychologically faithful cinematic reincarnation of the novelistic protagonist (who is much more headstrong and selfish) nor a bearer of any distinct post-modern themes. One can say that due to the dominance of the male zeitgeist discourse, the complexity and depth of the heroine have been sacrificed in order to better showcase the complexity and depth of the hero: Catherine's childishness is a perfect foil for Heathcliff's controlling sadism.

4. Conclusion

Each of the three filmic transpositions of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* has been shown to be focused on the enunciation of the spiritual kinship between the protagonists, the enunciation of the divide between them and the enunciation of power distribution between them. The first point has been interpreted by 1939, 1970 and 1993 versions in terms of chivalric romance, kinesthetic physicality and supernatural mysticism respectively; the second is treated in terms of pragmatism vs. romanticism, socialization vs. barbarization and childlike lightheartedness vs. mature broodiness respectively; and the third in terms of the heroine's domination, the protagonists' matched power status and the hero's domination respectively. The roots of these differences lie in the con-texts surrounding the adaptations. The version directed by Wyler was influenced by the Holliwood Production Code and the escalating political and military conflict in Europe, the one directed by Fuest experienced the impact of the sexual revolution and the realist aesthetic, and the one directed by Kosminsky was, to a large extent, moulded by the post-modern interest in the villainy and in the nineteenth-century literary classics.

In this paper, I have tried to demonstrate that the discussion of sibling adaptations in terms of their new cinematic contents and surrounding cultural contexts without any reference to the literary original (and thus without the need to tackle fidelity issues) is likely to yield very interesting insights about cinematic transpositions. This approach concentrates the researcher's attention on the interconnections existing between the filmic remakes and makes it possible to interpret the discovered differences in terms of the detected similarities (or vice versa). In other words, it allows to pinpoint some key respects in which all sibling versions in question are distinct from each other.

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List of abbreviations

WH1 – 1939 *Wuthering Heights*

WH2 – 1970 *Wuthering Heights*

WH3 – 1992 *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights. Quite the same Wikipedia. Just better. Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë's only novel, was published in 1847 under the pseudonym "Ellis Bell". She died the following year, aged 30. It was written between October 1845 and June 1846,[1] Wuthering Heights and Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey were accepted by publisher Thomas Newby before the success of their sister Charlotte's novel Jane Eyre. Wuthering Heights (1847) was the only novel written by Emily Brontë (the middle Brontë sister), and an archetypal example of a Gothic Romance, which deals primarily with the cycle of abuse across generations. It is 1801. The foppish gentleman Mr. Lockwood has moved to Thrushcross Grange, a manor house in the windswept and desolate Yorkshire Moors. He introduces himself to Heathcliff, his surly, ill-mannered and unwelcoming landlord, and master of the nearby Wuthering Heights. 4 Wuthering Heights. foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones. Wuthering Heights. "What the devil is the matter?" he asked, eyeing me in a manner that I could ill endure, after this inhospitable treatment. "What the devil, indeed!"