



Tikrit University

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English Department

Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights as World Literature

Lectures by

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1. Circulation and "Gaining in Translation"

David Damrosch posits that world literature is not a fixed canon, but a mode of circulation: a work becomes world literature when it **gains in translation** rather than losing its essential power.

- **Detachment from Local Moralism:** Upon its initial release, *Wuthering Heights* was heavily criticized by British reviewers for its perceived brutality, lack of moral purpose, and coarse language.
- **Universalization of Theme:** Stripped of localized 19th-century British domestic expectations, international translations focused on its elemental dynamics: psychological obsession, class conflict, boundary transgression, and the opposition between wild nature and civilizational order.
- **Global Reception:** The novel evolved from a controversial regional work into a archetype of tragic passion across Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

2. Heathcliff as a Subaltern and Postcolonial Figure

A major reason for the novel's resonance across diverse global geographies is the deliberate ambiguity surrounding **Heathcliff's origins**.

"Is he a ghoul? [...] Where did he come from? [...] Was he a wandering gipsy, or a little American, or Spanish castaway?" — *Nelly Dean, Chapter 34*

- **The Port of Liverpool:** Mr. Earnshaw finds Heathcliff in Liverpool—a booming 18th-century hub for the transatlantic slave trade and imperial commerce. Heathcliff is described as dark-skinned, speaking a language no one understands, and lacking a surname or genealogy.

- **Postcolonial Critiques:** Scholars like Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said highlight Heathcliff as an emblem of colonial alterity (the "Other") imported into the domestic heart of Britain.
- **Global Adaptability:** Because Heathcliff embodies the disenfranchised, racialized outsider seeking vengeance against a rigid hierarchy, non-Western cultures easily adapt his character to local dynamics of class, caste, or colonial oppression.

3. Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Transmutation

World literature actively mutates when it takes root in foreign literary and cinematic ecosystems. *Wuthering Heights* has proven exceptionally malleable across radically different cultures:

Adaptation	Region / Era	Key Transmutation
<i>Abismos de Pasión</i> (dir. Luis Buñuel, 1954)	Mexico	Replaces the Yorkshire moors with the arid Mexican countryside; translates Gothic obsession into Surrealist, anti-bourgeois melodrama.
<i>Arashi ga oka</i> (dir. Yoshishige Yoshida, 1988)	Japan (Yamato Period)	Shifts the setting to medieval Japan; replaces Western religious subtexts with Shinto

spirit cults, local mythology, and sacred volcanic terrain.

Dil Diya Dard Liya (dir. India (Bollywood)
A.R. Kardar, 1966)

Adapts the core narrative into a Hindi musical drama, mapping Heathcliff and Catherine's conflict onto Indian feudal class structures.

4. Narrative Distance as an Ethnographic Device

The structural design of *Wuthering Heights* mimics an international reader's encounter with an unfamiliar culture.

- **Double Frame Narrative:** The story is filtered through **Lockwood** (an urban, sophisticated outsider from London) listening to **Nelly Dean** (a rural insider).
- **Anthropological Framing:** Lockwood's journal entries read like foreign field notes documenting the "savage" customs of the moors. By framing the local Yorkshire setting as an exotic, foreign territory *within* Britain itself, Brontë accidentally constructed a narrative architecture that lowers the barrier to entry for non-British readers.