

## REVIEWS OF WILLIAM WYLER'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

**Frank S. Nugent, "Goldwyn Presets Film of 'Wuthering Heights' at Rivoli," *New York Times*, April 14, 1939**

After a long recess, Samuel Goldwyn has returned to serious screen business again with his film "Wuthering Heights," which had its première at the Rivoli last night. It is Goldwyn at his best, and better still, Emily Brontë at hers. Out of her strange tale of a tortured romance Mr. Goldwyn and his troupe have fashioned a strong and somber film, poetically written as the novel not always was, sinister and wild as it was meant to be, far more compact dramatically than Miss Brontë had made it. During December's dusty researches we expect to be filing it away among the year's best ten; in April it is a living thing, vibrant as the wind that swept Times Square last night.

One of the most incredible aspects of it is the circumstance that the story has reached the screen through the agency of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, as un-Brontian a pair of infidels as ever danced a rigadonn upon a classicist's grave. But be assured: as Alexander Woollcott was saying last week, they've done right by our Emily. It isn't exactly a faithful transcription, which would have served neither Miss Brontë nor the screen—whatever the Brontë societies may think about it. But it is a faithful adaptation, written reverently and well, which goes straight to the heart of the book, explores its shadows and draws dramatic fire from the savage flints of scene and character hidden there.

And it has been brilliantly played. Laurence Olivier's Heathcliff is the man. He has Heathcliff's broad lowering brow, his scowl, the churlishness, the wild tenderness, the bearing, speech and manner of the demon-possessed. Charlotte Brontë, in her preface to her sister's novel, said Heathcliff never loved Cathy; the only claim he might have had to humanity was his lukewarm regard for Hareton Earnshaw; take that away, she said, and Heathcliff is demon, ghoul or Afreet. Hecht and MacArthur have taken Hareton away. In fact, they have removed the novel's entire second generation, have limited the story to Heathcliff and Cathy, to Edgar and Isabella Linton and their servants, dogs and the desolate moor where their drama is played. But Heathcliff is no demon and he loved Cathy, in the film as in the novel.

To the sheltered Brontës, it must have seemed that a passion so consuming, violent and destructive—of itself and what it touched—must have been diabolic. Even now on the Rivoli's screen there is something overwhelming in the tumult of the drama's pulse, the sweep and surge of Heathcliff's love and hate, their crushing before them of all the softness of that Yorkshire world a century ago, their brave defiance of heaven and hell and death itself. No wonder Charlotte recoiled in holy horror and exclaimed "Afreet!" and that Emily, like Mrs. Shelley with her "Frankenstein," only dimly sensed the potent force she was wielding.

So Mr. Olivier has played Heathcliff, and Merle Oberon, as Cathy, has matched the brilliance of his characterization with hers. She has perfectly caught the restless, changeling spirit of the Brontë heroine who knew she was not meant for heaven and broke her heart and Heathcliff's in the synthetic paradise of her marriage with gentle Edgar Linton. The Lintons, so pallid, so namby-pamby in the novel, have been more charitably reflected in the picture. David Nivens's Edgar, Geraldine Fitzgerald's Isabella are dignified and poignant characterizations of two young people whose tragedy was not in being weak themselves but in being weaker than the abnormal pair whose destinies involved their destruction. And, in Flora Robson's Ellen (Nellie in the novel), in Miles Mander's Mr. Lockwood, Hugh Williams's sottish Hindley, and the others, Mr. Goldwyn has provided a flawless supporting cast.

William Wyler has directed it magnificently, surcharging even his lighter scenes with an atmosphere of suspense and foreboding, keeping his horror-shadowed narrative moving at a steadily accelerating pace, building absorbingly to its tragic climax. It is, unquestionably, one of the most distinguished pictures of the year, one of the finest ever produced by Mr. Goldwyn, and one you should decide to see.

*Wuthering Heights, Time, April 17, 1939*

Wuthering Heights (United Artists-Sam Goldwyn). "A minor sensation has been caused by the announcement that the Hollywood film version of 'Wuthering Heights' is to be called Wuthering Heights. . . . The decision . . . [was] made by no less a person than Mr. Sam Goldwyn. Mr. Goldwyn is a legendary figure who has a fine autocratic way with the English language and chronology and things like that. . . . Still, the title is not everything; and its retention does not—witness among many others the conspicuous case of Bengal Lancer—at all imply that the film will be even remotely identifiable with the book."

These disdainful words appeared last August in a London Times editorial. Last week they might well have been eaten by their author. As produced by Mr. Goldwyn, directed by William Wyler and acted by Merle Oberon, Lawrence Olivier, David Niven and Flora Robson, Wuthering Heights is not only readily identifiable with the book but one of the season's distinguished pictures.

As cinematerial, Wuthering Heights might seem as farfetched a prospect as any book yet pillaged. It is crammed with neurotic, 19th-Century gloom, ridden with implications of incest, short on action, careless of conventional morality. As additional drawbacks, Mr. Olivier, entrusted with the crucial role of Heathcliff, boasts that he dislikes working for the movies and only does it for money; Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, preparing for their labors on Gunga Din, could barely be persuaded to leave their marathon backgammon game long enough to write a script. The script turned out brilliantly. Olivier's work as Heathcliff is a speaking tribute to the efficacy of the profit motive.

Before making the picture, Producer Goldwyn, a stickler for detail, landscaped 540 California acres into a Yorkshire moor. He imported eight British actors, a dialect expert to see that their accents matched, 1,000 panes of hand-blown glass for interior shots and 1,000 heather plants for outdoors. He did not attempt to send for Emily Bronte. In spite of this oversight, there is not much she could have done to improve this screen translation of her masterpiece.