

---

Sue Lonoff and Terri A. Hasseler, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*. NY: Modern Language Association, 2006. 195p.

VÉRONIQUE MACHELIDON  
MEREDITH COLLEGE

If, as J. Hillis Miller notes, “each [critic of *Wuthering Heights*] takes some one element of the novel and extrapolates it towards a total explanation,” thus necessarily violating its integrity (qtd. in *Approaches* 130), the collection of essays and didactic considerations edited by Lonoff and Hasseler succeeds in preserving the complexity of Emily Brontë’s masterpiece without ever taming or fetishizing it. This is a rare accomplishment on the part of editors whose purpose is trifold: to supply teaching resources, “to focus on the issues most important to teachers, [and] to present an array of approaches” to a canonical text, which is taught in a wide array of courses and departments (2).

In addition to these three goals, which are those of the series published by the MLA, Lonoff and Hasseler sought to give a distinct voice to students and to record directly their experiences, responses, challenges, and needs as readers. The most significant sign of this welcome emphasis on a learner-centered pedagogy is the survey that the authors designed and administered to a sample of 709 students in 35 courses in the United States, Canada, England, and Spain. The student responses to the survey provide illuminating insights for both novice and experienced teachers, as they reveal students’ pre-reading assumptions and expectations about the novel, their difficulties while reading it, and their requests for specific class materials. The survey also highlights interesting discrepancies between learners’ and teachers’ expectations about their courses.

Given the breadth of the student population sampled and the apparent effort to sample an “international” population, it is somewhat disconcerting and disappointing that the survey could not be given to foreign students of British literature, who do not have English as a mother tongue. This is all the more regrettable since *Wuthering Heights* is a favorite in British literature courses in many universities where English is not the official language. Had the survey been administered to foreign students with a different mother tongue, other teaching difficulties and pedagogic considerations might have come to light.

Nevertheless Lonoff and Hasseler have fulfilled their promise to be more learner-centered: by including the sort of pedagogical material requested by the student readers (such as a family tree for the characters of *Wuthering Heights*), by having contributors share samples of student writings, and, last but not least, by including articles from professors at community colleges who teach non-traditional students

---

from minority groups. As a result, teachers of courses where literary analysis may not be the primary or most obvious focus will be encouraged to adopt the novel.

Besides the results of the student survey which Lonoff and Hasseler's readers may well want to administer to their own classes, the first part of *Approaches* provides helpful information to teachers of Emily Brontë, such as a comparison between different editions of the novel, with their specific critical apparatus and supplementary material. In the "Instructor's Library" it discusses editions of Emily's other works, the most relevant biographies and background studies, criticism and theory most often used by teachers to explicate the novel, and additional teaching material in media other than print. Here teachers can find useful pointers to aural and visual sources and to web resources in order to contextualize their lessons and help students with the social, historical, literary, and geographical contexts of the novel.

The second half of the book, titled "Approaches," offers fascinating papers on a variety of pedagogical approaches to *Wuthering Heights*. It is this part of the volume which truly does justice to Emily Brontë's talent by highlighting the many different layers of the novel, the variety of literary, social, historical, biographical, psychological, and narratorial questions it raises, and its fierce resistance to simplification. The essays will inspire professors to include this exceptional novel in syllabi for courses as vastly different as "Domestic Violence in Fiction," "Psychoanalysis and Literature," "Film Adaptation and Literary Criticism," or "Education in Literature." The best essays in this collection are those which throw a new critical light on the novel while offering methodologies and pedagogical tools that can be applied to teach other texts.

For instance, Carine Mardorossian shares a list of discussion questions that she uses in class to show how race designations in the novel are used as a "figuration for class and gender crossing" (45). She demonstrates how Heathcliff and Catherine the elder are "blackened" or "whitened" depending on their situation towards the dominant class and class boundaries. The same methodology and critical theory can fruitfully be applied to other examples of 19th-century world literature, such as George Sand's *Indiana* or Claire de Duras' *Ourika*. Diane Hoeveler takes her students in another direction as she establishes a dialogue between Freudian theory, biography, and the novel. Interpreting the novel in the light of the author's trauma, she uses the text to illustrate Freud's theory of dreamwork. By giving access to her syllabi and to definitions of psychoanalytic terms and concepts online, she invites the reader to develop his/her own courses on Literature and Psychoanalysis. As a final example of these enlightening yet pragmatic contributions, Kamilla Elliott shares helpful tips for teaching film adaptation as a form of literary criticism, for raising issues of authenticity, originality, and fidelity, and for identifying ideological impulses at work in screen adaptations. The reader will find her exhaustive list of

---

available (and lost) film and television adaptations particularly thought-provoking and may wish to order some of them to discuss the international reception of Emily Brontë's novel in France, Spain, or Japan.

One final accomplishment of *Approaches* is that both editors and contributors have succeeded in staying away from critical and theoretical jargon, thus making the volume accessible to teachers and students alike. Professors who deplore that their students are yearning for an elusive simplification of *Wuthering Heights* and are seeking help from *Cliff's Notes* and the like, will find it useful to assign sections from this volume to their classes. ✱