

*Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and adapted by Jane Thornton, directed by Iona Anderson  
Stagecraft Theatre, Gryphon Theatre, 22 Ghuznee Street, till 26 September  
Reviewed by Ewen Coleman on 16 September 2009

While novels that have become classics of English literature have been adapted for the cinema and TV on countless occasions, none more so the Emily Bronte's dark and brooding tale of unrequited love, *Wuthering Heights*, it appears only now that they are being adapted for the stage. No doubt the fact that most are rich, densely-written tales full of characters and situations that don't easily translate to the stage is the reason; *Wuthering Heights* is a prime example of this, as even the many film and versions have only ever focused on the first half - up to the death of Cathy, after the birth of her daughter Catherine - and rarely has an adaptation followed through with the story of the second generation. Yet Jane Thornton, whose adaptation is currently playing at the Gryphon Theatre has, within the space of two hours done just that, and although the ending does become a little confusing overall she has encapsulated well the essence of the well known story of Cathy and Heathcliff and their tortured relationship of all-consuming passion that not only destroys them but many of those around them.

Image and atmosphere are attributes of Emily Bronte's writing that have popularised the novel over the years and this production under the direction of Iona Anderson of Jane Thornton's adaptation has these in bucket loads. The set, lighting and soundscape is as gloomy, dark and depressing as you can get yet it all comes together beautifully to underscore the angst ridden narrative of *Wuthering Heights*. Rising skyward and dominating the set is a large set of steps that is used most effectively throughout the production and around which are areas symbolising the mansion of Wuthering Heights, where the tortured souls of the Earnshaw family live, and the happier household of the Grange where the Linton family live. The stylised presentation of the production moves effortlessly around these areas creating easily recognisable visions of indoor and out scenes. However a little lighter dressing in the way of curtaining around the Linton household would have added better contrast to the two households and thus to Cathie's contrasting dispositions. The stylisation of the production was in fact most effective, especially as a lot of the story is narrative delivered by various members of the cast to the audience, often a sure recipe for tedium, yet not in this production such was the creative and innovative way the director had choreographed the overall production. Especially effective, although apparently scripted, was the use of non-contact in the combat/fight scenes and the use of black umbrellas to signify death and burial, of which there are many in this story.

Overall the actors equipped themselves well with their understanding of the complexities of the story, showing honest and genuine emotion that brought a reality to the story, never allowing the angst laden play to turn to melodrama. Rebecca Parker was excellent as Cathy, headstrong and wild, this underlying passion and fiery spirit always evident, even when she acquiesced to Edgar Linton's marriage proposals, showing all too clearly that she and Heathcliff were one and the same person. The young Catherine was played in complete contrast making this character very believable as well. And Benjamin Priest's Heathcliff, while a little mannered at times, which will no doubt loosen up as the season progresses, had all the dark, body vindictiveness associated with the character, a product of his upbringing, he nevertheless showed how this overtook his personality and the way he enjoyed seeking sadistic revenge on those around him.

The supporting cast were also of a high standard: Shannon Tubman as the servant and chief narrator Nelly Dean, Jim Stanton as the Linton daughter Isabelle and in the dual role of father and son in each family, Alan Carabott as Hindley and Hareton Earnshaw and Reuben Brickell as Edgar Linton and his son Linton all contributing to making what could be a very depressing play one that is immensely entertaining.