

'Emily Brontë and Degradation', Professor Helen Small

Emily Brontë's imaginative engagement with the concept of degradation is no less powerful for being far from systematic. This lecture will start by looking closely at Catherine Earnshaw's claim (central to the plot of *Wuthering Heights*) that she cannot marry Heathcliff once he has been educationally and socially degraded under her brother Hindley's abusive authority, because such a marriage would in turn degrade her. Much of the drama that follows hinges on the tension between how Catherine employs the notion of degradation, and what Heathcliff means when he turns it back against her. The lecture will then take a wider view of how the novel treats questions of status and power in human society and in the natural world. The final part will consider a range of Brontë's poetry, asking what her handling of the drama of degradation contributes to the exceptional intensity of her writing and its strangeness within the established canons of Victorian literary culture.

Reading List:

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, text ed. by Ian Jack, with an Introduction and Notes by Helen Small, World's Classics (Oxford: OUP, 2009)

The Poems of Emily Brontë, ed. Derek Roper and Edward Chitham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry, Poetics, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), ch. 12

Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (1994; London: Abacus, 2010)

John Bayley, 'Kitchen Devil' [review essay], *London Review of Books*, 12/24 (20 December 1990)

Leo Bersani, 'Desire and Metamorphosis', in his *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), 189-219

Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton, NY: Princeton UP, 2007)

Edward Chitham, *The Birth of Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë at Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998)

Janet Gezari, *Last Things: Emily Brontë's Poems* (Oxford: OUP, 2008)

Angela Leighton, 'The Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: CUP, 2002)

Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004)