‘Wuthering Heights’: All freak, no substance

By ADRIHANNA COLLINS
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We are in a fake, freaky epidemic.

In an era where content can be so easily consumed, many movies try to draw audiences to the box office with quirky, overly sexual stunts. These ploys are rarely plot-relevant and oftentimes so extremely surface-level that it falls flat.

“Saltburn” Director Emerald Fennell is the queen of the fake freaky genre, and ““Wuthering Heights,”” based on the Emily Bronte novel, is no different.

““Wuthering Heights”” is the story of a young girl named Cathy (Charlotte Mellington) growing up in a rotting estate with an alcoholic father who squanders their wealth. Her father adopts a boy named Heathcliff (Owen Cooper) and the two fall in love from their childhood into adolescence.

When adolescent Cathy (Margot Robbie) gets the opportunity to marry their rich neighbor Edgar Linton (Shazad Latif), she decides to accept his proposal, though she instantly regrets it. By the time she goes to break off the engagement, Heathcliff (Jacob Elordi) has already run off. Cathy ultimately ends up marrying Edgar, but is unhappy despite her wealth. A few years later, Heathcliff returns with a fortune and Cathy and Heathcliff start an affair. Edgar finds out and refuses to let Cathy see him again.

Heathcliff elopes with Edgar’s sister Isabella (Alison Oliver) and becomes increasingly obsessive towards Cathy. He writes letters to Cathy that her housekeeper, Nellie (Hong Chau), burns. The movie ends with Cathy dying of septicemia from a miscarriage (Edgar’s baby) and Heathcliff crying over her dead body.

I went into Fennell’s third film with low expectations. I have never read ““Wuthering Heights,”” but I enjoy a good period piece. However, good is not how I would describe the initial reactions I had seen on social media.

When casting came out, many were upset by the lineup, particularly Robbie as Cathy and Elordi as Heathcliff.

Thirty five-year-old Robbie plays a 12–18 year old girl. Though I don’t dislike when older actors play younger roles, I do expect the character to be aged-up in personality. This is not the case with this interpretation.


ILLUSTRATION BY LILLIAN CURTIN

Robbie plays a teen girl the whole movie. She stomps her feet, whines and showcases a certain naivete that is a little degrading. This, rather than coming off faithful to the text, feels like age regressing.

Fennell often orchestrates scenes for young Cathy that are highly sexual. Rather, it’s masturbating on top of the Moors or watching two servants have sex with horse bridles on. This is typical of Fennell’s work, but it feels creepy when the character is a minor.

The trouble with Heathcliff is that he is canonically not white but is being played by the very white Elordi. Though the book never makes it abundantly clear what Heathcliff’s ethnicity is, he is mixed race. He is often bullied and abused by his peers; the Lintons don’t like him and Cathy questions whether she can marry him because of his race.

I believe Fennell took out this crucial piece of context because she wanted to make a film about obsession rather than tackling the controversial themes inherent within the text, including racism, domestic violence and generational trauma.

Fennell cuts out the entire second half of the book, which focuses on Heathcliff being abusive to Cathy’s son and her daughter mimicking the abuse he went through from Cathy’s father. Instead, she focuses on the scandalous and salacious affairs of the first half while leaving out some very integral details.

Heathcliff is incredibly abusive to Isabella throughout the entire book. He beats her and almost kills her dog. The movie instead gives Isabella a submission kink. When Nellie comes to check in on Isabella, we find her chained up like a dog and barking. When they attempt to rescue her, she refuses and says she likes it.

Typically, as time passes, the less controversial a piece of art seems to get. The things our grandparents used to clutch their pearls at barely make us blink now. The same cannot be said for the themes in ““Wuthering Heights.”” Our society still does not like to confront themes of racism and violence. And seemingly neither does Fennell.

Rather than making a movie that forces people to confront the typical idea of a period piece and talk about how violent behaviors are passed down through generations, Fennell gives us an adaptation that’s focused on obsessive love. This trope is explored in every one of her movies.

Fennell made ““Wuthering Heights”” not for bookworms but for cinephiles. The movie is stunningly shot. The mise en scene is just gorgeous in that it’s such an filthily excessive style that is common in Fennell movies. It’s a study of true filmmaking, but it’s not a true study of adaptation.

Director Guillermo Del Toro had a famous saying during the “Frankenstein” press tour that “Adapting a book is like marrying a widow. You have to respect the late husband, but on Saturdays, you are allowed to get it on.”

Fennell instead chose to spit on the husband’s grave and get it on every day instead.

What was up with the Super Bowl ads this year?

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Did you notice the use of AI-generated video in this year’s Super Bowl ads? Sixty six ads aired during Super Bowl LX — 15 of them included some form of AI generated media, according to the New York Times. There were some incredibly bizarre AI generated ads, like the Svedka Vodka commercial with dancing robots, as well as more subtle ads that were not as easy to spot AI.

The Super Bowl is THE premier event in the U.S. for advertisements. With over 130 million concurrent viewers, a single ad could completely change the trajectory of a company. It drives in new customers, employees and investors. In short, these are no billboard ads you would see on I-95. However, over a 100 million impressions doesn’t come without a cost.

A 30-second ad spot sold for around $8 million this year — nearly double the cost a decade ago. While viewership has steadily increased in the past decade, it certainly hasn’t doubled, not even close. An increasing cost every year makes it harder for companies to pay for ads; therefore, in order to save money, companies have to cut costs on production. Generative AI is cheap — dirt cheap.

Anyone could prompt an AI software to create virtually anything for free or for a small fee. It seems like a no-brainer for companies; however, AI videos are new and look cheap. More importantly, it takes away jobs from actors, directors, cameramen and editors. AI generation also consumes a massive amount of electricity and resources. Additionally, AI-generated video could be misleading and falsely represent reality. Many of these ads have been facing backlash from younger viewers. Teens and young adults are more likely to recognize that a video is AI generated, however, elderly viewers may have a much harder time spotting AI in videos. This is dangerous for a number of reasons. For one, they may be more susceptible to AI-scam videos on social media, whether it would be fake products or celebrity endorsements.

Super Bowl advertisers leverage this to their advantage — not to scam customers — but to save money. Older viewers are less likely to notice that an ad includes AI, but they also may not realize the negative impacts it has. In 2025, 60% of adults ages 18-34 in the U.S. have heard a lot about AI, compared to 38% of adults ages 50+, according to Pew Research.

Advertisers evaluate the risks involved with using AI. It could leave a permanent stain on their company’s reputation, but does the money saved outweigh that risk? There's a chance older viewers would not notice any use of AI at all; therefore, their perception of the company or product would not be negatively altered. This will only increase in the future. AI is still brand new, but exponentially improving. In a few years, AI video could be indistinguishable from real life, causing even the most educated young adults to be susceptible.

As generative AI improves each year, so will the amount of AI generated ads. Besides all of the negative impacts previously mentioned, it also takes the fun out of advertisements. Think back to your favorite Super Bowl ad. Was it a time-traveling Doritos ad from Super Bowl XLVIII? Or what about the infamous Tubi commercial that had viewers scrambling to find their remotes during Super Bowl LVII? These ads were creative and fun… AI takes that away. It takes the human aspect out of ads.

Next Super Bowl, who knows how many AI ads there will be. There could be 30, there could be three. It all depends on how consumers react. While some companies are using AI to save money, other companies like OpenAI are pushing these ads to increase publicity for AI tools so more people will use them. As long as people continue to use AI software like ChatGPT, the company will have the funds to invest in improved technology.

What can the consumer do to combat the use of AI?

The most simple and effective way to protest the use of AI is to stop purchasing products from companies that use it. If a company’s stock or income decreases, they’ll realize AI ads are not working out. Consumers also have the power to spread awareness online and inform older demographics on how to spot AI.


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