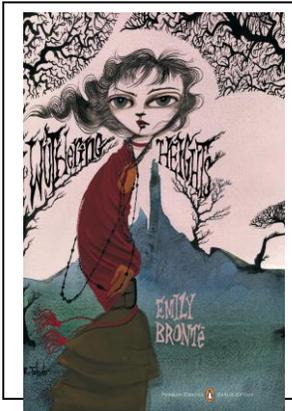**English 138: Essay #2 – Identity and Morality in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights***

When *Wuthering Heights* was first published, many reviewers found the book disturbing, especially because of its characters. For example, it's hard to imagine a stronger reaction than this one:

- "There is not in the entire *dramatis personae* a single character which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible. If you do not detest the person, you despise him; and if you do not despise him, you detest him with your whole heart" (283).

Many reviewers were also puzzled by the book because they saw it as lacking in morality, as evidenced by remarks such as these:

- "What may be the moral which the author wishes the reader to deduce from his work, it is difficult to say; and we refrain from assigning any, because to speak honestly, we have discovered none but mere glimpses of hidden morals or secondary meanings" (285).

- "We are not disposed to ascribe any particular intention to the author in drawing the character of Heathcliff, nor can we perceive any obvious moral in the story" (286).

Given the disturbing and puzzling aspects of the text, write an analytic essay that tries to make sense of them.

Write an argument about <u>one</u> of these topics:
- **The search for identity**
- **The question of morality**

➢ <u>For more details, see the back of this sheet</u>

Strive for a well-organized, well-supported essay that gives thoughtful attention to the implications of details.

➢ **Note:** If you are interested in developing ideas on another topic, please check with me.

Main Objectives: This assignment is designed to encourage you to think critically about the reading and to communicate your insights in an effective and credible manner. Your key goals are these:
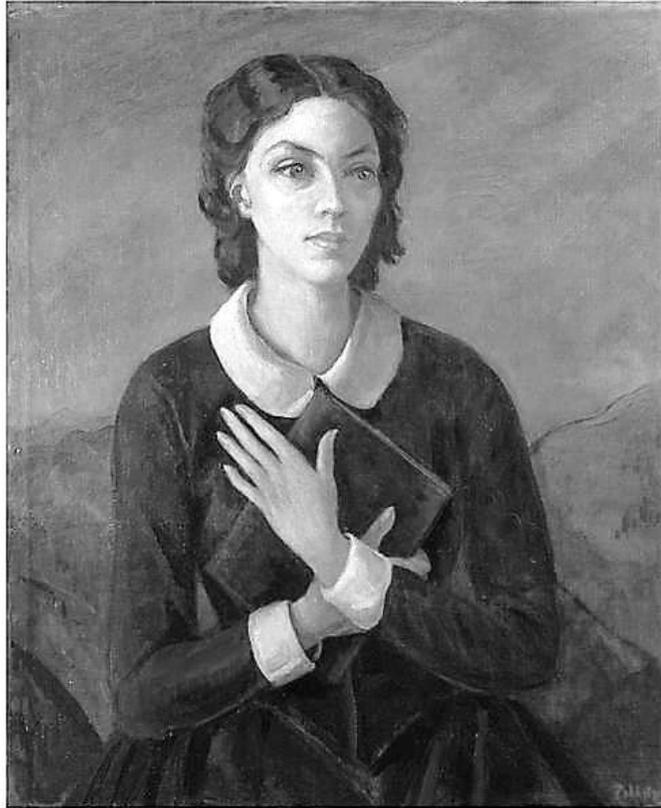
- Make a clear and direct argument. Provide a thesis statement (an arguable claim) in your introduction.
- Support your argument with developed body paragraphs that draw out the implications of textual details.
- Organize your argument by creating assertive topic sentences, unified paragraphs, and smooth transitions.
- Establish credibility by presenting a convincing and academic-looking paper. Quote and cite according to MLA format and carefully proofread your essay.

Percentage of Course Grade: 20%
Format: 5-6 complete pages, MLA style, typed, double spaced.
Due Date: See class schedule. Submit both a paper copy in class and an electronic copy to Turnitin.com.

Grading Criteria: Papers will be evaluated upon the effectiveness and clarity with which they address the essay topic and meet the stated objectives of the assignment. More specifically, they will be evaluated according to a grading rubric on our class website.

Additional Information on the Essay Topics:

❖ <u>The search for identity:</u> One could argue that most of the characters in *Wuthering Heights* are in search of identity (or a more satisfying sense of self) and that this search generates and helps to explain much of the tension and conflict in the novel. Characters seem to struggle with how they are seen and how they see themselves. As a result, they may try to enhance their sense of self in various ways—for example, through means of power, through education, through escape, through a connection to place, through a connection to another person, and so on. What drives the search for identity? What forms does it take? Where does it lead?

> *In an essay, discuss the search for identity (using one or more characters in the book).*

❖ <u>The question of morality:</u> Despite the reservations of some early critics, one could argue that *Wuthering Heights* offers its readers some sort of moral lesson. Yes, the book may include some seriously messed up situations, but what does the text end up teaching us? For example, what useful lesson might it teach about inequality, power, oppression, revenge, obsession, compassion, love, etc.?

> *In an essay, discuss the question of morality (focusing on one or more key topics in the book, such as the ones listed above). Tip: avoid a long list of topics; a tight focus works best.*